

# The Virgin and the Unicorn

Four Plays  
by Oscar Mandel



The Virgin and the Unicorn  
Water From an Italian Pump  
And the Lord God Planted a Garden  
A Beautiful Investment

A Spectrum Productions Book

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## PREFACE

In rough shorthand, the four plays in this volume speak essentially in two voices—the voice of prose and the voice of poetry. By prose I mean down-to-earth dialogue in contemporary settings, by poetry I mean flights into spaces that never were, whether articulated in verse or not.

I have arranged the plays so as to create two little voice-waves with them, poetry-prose-poetry-prose. The reader's armchair journey begins with a unicorn roaming through a mock-medieval landscape lightly sprinkled with metaphysical suggestions; then comes a tale I have imagined as taking place, why not? at New York University, in whose halls, elevators, musty classrooms and agitated neighborhood I spent my four undergraduate years; followed by an ascension to the Garden of Eden, though not quite in the spirit of the prophets and rabbis; and concluding with a descent to an upholstered-furniture plant in Orlando, Florida, where the journey trails off with a view of trucks driving "onto the highway beyond."

In addition to the plays, the reader and future producers will find, in an appendix, a number of corrections and minor revisions to several dramatic works published in earlier books, among them the two-volume *Collected Plays* brought out by Unicorn Press in the early seventies.

As far as *The Virgin and the Unicorn* is concerned, though it has been published twice before this—once in my *Collected Plays*, the revisions this time are so very substantial that they warrant a new full printing rather than notes in an appendix. I made these revisions, first at the time I was adapting the play into French as *La Vierge et la licorne*, and then again in preparation for a staged reading in Hollywood by a group of enterprising actors. The comedy's basic conception and shape remain, however, what they were from the beginning.

Unlike *The Virgin and the Unicorn*, the next two works I am presenting here have appeared so far only in magazines. *Water From an Italian Pump* was printed in a short-lived quarterly called *The Mediterranean Review* (I remember that it boasted a prestigious ad-

dress on the island of Majorca but was actually edited on *Long Island*); and my Adam and Eve play was published in *The Kenyon Review*. The bibliographic details for these and my other plays are given in Appendix B.

*And the Lord God Planted a Garden* is only slightly retouched from the original. But the changes I have wrought to my *Italian Pump* are radical, because shortly after it was first printed, I discovered a fatal flaw in its logic—an impossibility that had no merit whatever, unlike some of the ablogical events that constitute absurdist drama. Mending the problem required a thoroughgoing reconception, including the addition of two characters.

The last play in this book—*A Beautiful Investment*—has been neither printed nor performed to date. I am thankfully indebted for all its manufacturing lore to Mrs. Eve Heyman, who, together with her late husband, owned the business I describe (in Southern California, however), and had the kindness to expend several of her crowded hours teaching me how it works. Whether a play which includes a film so specifically focused as this one can ever be realized in performance is more than I can guess. I will be happy enough if, along with the others, and like them, it pleases as a “good read,” a novella in dialogue form.

I keep appealing to *readers* in this brief preface, in spite of the aversion to reading plays that many book-lovers voice. I happen to think that the plays I am offering here function equally well as dramatic stories and as stageable scripts. Besides, the aversion in question is a peculiar and fairly recent fit of the sulks; in ages past plays were avidly read, read as literature whether they had been staged or not. Fortunately, many readers do continue to enjoy sitting down with a play the same way they do with a novel; and a playwright who combines a sense of the stage with a literary instinct can only hope to increase their number.

I might add that playwrights have a special stake in attracting readers. Of course we all want to hear that our darlings are eagerly wooed by producers. But which one of us cannot tell a tale of horror about the molestations our scripts have suffered as they were being groomed for a theater? Injuries no conductor permits himself to inflict on a musical score. If readers misinterpret and manhandle,

they do so at any rate in the privacy of their homes. At worst, we know that our very own texts, down to their humblest comma and conjunction, lie under the readers' eyes. They endure no cruel cuts, no impertinent additions, no callous shiftings around of speeches, no anachronistic costumes.

Bless our readers, however few. . . .

Los Angeles 1993

# THE VIRGIN AND THE UNICORN

A Miraculous Drawing-Room Comedy



## CHARACTERS

UMFREY, *Earl of Dumfrey*

ROBERT, *Baron Theefton*

MARGARET, *the earl's wife*

RALF BASSET, *the earl's steward*

CLOTILDA BENNYWORTH,

*daughter of the earl's late chamberlain*

LEOFA, *the People's Delegate*

PETER, *a servant*

TWO MINSTRELS

*The action takes place in the Earl of Dumfrey's castle, during the reign of King Stephen the Merry. The earl, the baron, and Lady Margaret are in their thirties; Clotilda is distinctly younger; Ralf Basset is in his late fifties or early sixties.*

## ACT ONE

(A large room, warmly and cheerfully furnished, in the ancestral home of the Earl of Dumfrey. A small balcony overlooks the grounds. The curtain rises on a tableau: Peter, the servant, is exhibiting a gored poodle to the Earl of Dumfrey, Baron Theeston, and Ralf Basset. Far away is heard the strange trumpeting of an animal. It is the call of the unicorn)

EARL (*appalled*). Another one!

BARON. Very strange indeed. I must believe you now, my dear Umfrey. But do pull yourself together.

EARL. How can I? Wherever I turn, nothing but gored poodles, gored kittens, gored cows, horses, sheep, we even found a gored canary. God only knows how it happened. (*Trumpeting again*) Listen to the horrible beast.

BASSET (*gloomily*). Two thousand gored chickens. Our farmers are being pauperized. Whose poodle is it this time, Peter?

PETER. Lady Ann's, Master Basset.

EARL. Oh no. My wife's best friend. Has she been told?

PETER. Indeed she has, my lord. Lady Ann is in bed under sedation.

EARL. Oh my God, my God. Take the horrible thing away.

BARON (*who has been examining the poodle*). A clean penetration through the abdomen. A circular perforation of an inch and a quarter on one side of the poodle, and of something less than an inch on the other. This is no rapier thrust, Umfrey.

EARL. Robert—

BASSET (*to the baron*). My lord, allow Peter to take the poodle away. His lordship cannot bear—

BARON. Oh, of course, of course. (*Basset motions Peter away*)

EARL (*weakly*). And bring us something to drink, Peter.

PETER. Very good, my lord. (*He leaves with the poodle*)

EARL. So there it is. I'm deadly white from head to toe, my hands are chilly. I'll have grey hair before my time.

BASSET (*patting his hand*). There, there, my lord. A cup of wine will restore you.

EARL (*still weakly*). Good Ralf Basset. I'm beginning to understand it your way. And mark my words. If all men, bar none, had resembled you in this miserable earldom of mine, the unicorn would never have appeared to make life bitter to me.

BARON. What on earth do you mean, Umfrey? What has Master Basset got to do with the unicorn?

BASSET. Nothing, my lord.

EARL. No, tell him, let him understand it too.

BASSET. It's only a personal notion.

EARL. Personal nothing. When our common everyday wickedness rises, says Basset, when people become even less tolerable than they usually are, a sort of malevolence accumulates—like a foul pressure on the heavens—and then—it's happened before, you know—read the chronicles.

BARON. My friends, this animal has really gone too far if it has gored your brains as well.

EARL. You don't understand, Robert—lucky passer-by—you come and pay us a visit—jolly, dressed to kill, swimming in perfume, the song leaping from your lips like a kitten off a windowsill—you don't know the darkness of it all.

BARON. Nonsense, I'm still waiting to hear how this unpleasant unicorn is connected with our good Ralf Basset.

EARL. Good Ralf Basset—there's your answer. If we were all as good as he—don't you understand?

BARON. No, I don't.

BASSET. Perhaps later, my lord. I am deeply embarrassed.

EARL. Let the wicked be embarrassed, and in the highest places, not you! Wicked deeds, wicked thoughts—greed, ambition, envy, lust (*he groans*)—they begin to exceed the permitted excess—no innocence is left except here and there (*taking Basset's arm*)—and suddenly the unicorn appears, someone sees his long thin horn peering into a farmyard, the alarm is sounded, mothers call their children indoors, everyone is afraid of the dark—and yet for some reason the unicorn never kills people, he kills their livelihood, their pets—like the poodle . . .

BASSET. He exists because there are people; perhaps that's why he spares us.

EARL. Who knows? But when he arrives, the world becomes unhinged. Wives murder their husbands. People refuse to pay taxes. Rain falls on my fireworks. Merchants break contracts. I lose at chess. King Stephen demands fresh levies. Thank God, here's Peter again.

*(Enter Peter with refreshments. He serves the earl and the baron)*

EARL. Where is my wife, Peter?

PETER. Lady Margaret is in her Garden of Exotics, my lord, but she intends to call on Lady Ann as soon as Lady Ann wakes up. Water as usual, sir Ralf?

*(He pours water for Basset and exits)*

BARON. Water, Master Basset? The man who oversees the barrels in the earl's cellar? The lord of spigots?

BASSET. It's not that I'm not fond of wine, my lord; nor that I *am* fond of water. The truth is, I used to press the grape rather too freely, if anything.

EARL. Couldn't bear to see the wicked lot of us, that was why.

BASSET. Really, my lord! I simply swore to my poor wife on her deathbed to give it up. It's an old story, not worth telling.

BARON. Very touching, my dear Basset. I adore principles! Well, Umfrey, let the two of us sinners drink to the downfall of the unicorn. One of your men is bound to catch him sooner or later, and you'll be nailing his horn over your mantelpiece before the month is out.

BASSET. A man can never catch the unicorn, my lord.

BARON. Nonsense. And if one man can't, a dozen will.

BASSET. Not a dozen, nor a thousand. Only a virgin can.

BARON. A what?

BASSET. A virgin. Carrying a mirror in her hand, and walking at random in field or forest. She prays to the Holy Mother of God, and perhaps the unicorn appears. If he does, she turns the mirror to him, his face is caught, and he cannot move away from his image. Then she walks backward, holding the mirror

fast to the unicorn, and he follows, fascinated. It is the purity of the glass and the virgin's purity he follows, and he follows wherever she goes until she leads him to the men who kill him. But all this happens only perhaps.

BARON. Only perhaps what? Why haven't you sent a battalion of virgins out, for God's sake, each one holding up a mantelpiece mirror?

EARL. Oh, the things he doesn't know!

BASSET. Only a virgin can catch the unicorn, my lord, but a virgin does not *necessarily* catch him. God must decide. Do you see the difficulty? You send a girl out, mirror in hand. A girl with a reputation. But suppose she fails to catch the unicorn. Perhaps the time had not come. But perhaps on the other hand—

BARON. I see. (*A light comes*) I see!

BASSET. Now everybody wonders—is she, or isn't she? Father and mother lose their sleep, enemies chuckle, fingers are pointed, quarrels break out—

EARL. Besides, the world has gone so foul that half the girls in the realm would take offense if you asked them to go. Who wants to be an official virgin? On the other hand, the wallflowers who did go would be ruined if they came back empty-handed. You see, one way or the other—

BASSET. One daren't ask any girl—almost—(*the earl looks uncomfortable*)

BARON. I have an idea!

EARL. I'm sure we've tried it, Robert; he's *our* unicorn, you know.

BARON. Don't you want to hear it?

EARL (*wearily*). Of course we do.

BARON. Why not send out a girl ten years old? It's so simple, and so sublimely obvious, that it probably never occurred to any of you. A ten-year-old girl, carefully chosen, is sure to be immaculate, and would certainly not object to being thought so.

BASSET. I'm afraid—

EARL. Poor Robert, do you take the unicorn for a fool? A ten-year-old girl!

BARON. Or nine.

EARL. I'd laugh if I weren't on the edge of a breakdown. Leave me to my gloom. (*Half to himself*) My guilty gloom.

BASSET (*low*). Your idea is astute, my lord—

BARON. But?

BASSET. Ten-year-old, or nine-year-old girls have no effect on a unicorn. For him, a virgin is a girl who might be no virgin if she chose. You see the point, my lord: there has to be merit in it. Otherwise it's like asking a cat not to bark.

BARON. I give up.

BASSET. Very often I am tempted to do so too. I am the saddest steward in Christendom, my lord. Our unicorn is devouring the earldom. The beast is in all places at once. It comes easy, I suppose, to a supernatural creature. Lambs, rabbits, pheasants—everything gored, and what remains is hardly edible. The cattle is scrawny from worrying. The plums shrivel on the branch. Wedding fiddles are out of tune, and the dancers fall on their faces.

BARON. Perhaps I shouldn't have come.

EARL. Don't say that, Robert. You're my best friend, you know. We'll go hawking again together.

BASSET. My lord—

EARL. Oh God, I forgot, the hawks are gored. As for the foxes. . . . I shouldn't have written you at all.

BARON. Tush. I wanted to help. Provide you with ideas. When you sent a message about the unicorn, and about Lady Margaret's favorite greyhound—remember, I have known Margaret forever: we grew up together—I dropped everything, I rushed here with hardly an attendant. I am at your service, Umfrey; the ancient oath, baron to earl, and all the rest.

EARL. Have another cup of wine, Robert.

(*He sits down heavily in a chair. Loud boos are heard outside*)

EARL and BARON. What's that?

BASSET. I'll go see. (*He leans out from a window*) Dear heavens!

EARL. What now? And do I have to know it?

BASSET (*reluctantly*). It's Clotilda.

(*The earl gets up as if stung, then doesn't know what to say*)

BARON. Clotilda?

BASSET. The daughter of our late chamberlain.

BARON (*looking out the window*). Why is that mob booing her?  
Somebody threw a lump of mud!

EARL. No . . .

BARON. Handsome girl! Look at her! Watch her walking absolutely through them! Magnificent! (*Shouting*) Rabble! Umfrey, do something! Wait—I think she's come in at the gate. I can't see her anymore.

BASSET. Yes, she has come in.

EARL. Is she safe? Where's the crowd now? What are they doing?

BASSET. They're dispersing, my lord.

BARON. You look petrified, Umfrey. Who was this, who is this, what is going on? I insist on being told.

EARL. I suppose she'll come up here. (*Basset looks at the earl, who shrugs his shoulders*)

BASSET (*discreetly*). A very sad affair, my lord. Bennyworth, our chamberlain, clamored to have his daughter dispatched to find the unicorn. It was a point of honor for him. Perhaps ambition. And we dispatched her. Lord Dumfrey was most reluctant—most, most reluctant: he has such delicate feelings. He struggled, but to refuse outright was impossible—as bad as expressing an open and official doubt about the Bennyworth family. Well, she was dispatched, and she returned without. It means nothing, you understand, the Immaculate Saint Hilda, our patroness in heaven, might have failed too, if I may so express it, but the people do not make fine discriminations—and even in better circles—in short, a few well-bred snickers killed our chamberlain. The mother, thank God, had been mercifully dead for years. (*To the earl, whose anguish is obvious*) My lord, calm yourself, I beg you. You are not even remotely to blame; on the contrary, everyone knows how generously, how persistently, you opposed poor Bennyworth.

BARON. It's obvious you did your best, old man. Come on, what's done is done. The storm will blow over; it's only the first—

*(Enter Clotilda Bennyworth. She glides in with a look of mournful reproach, and sits down on a stool in a corner. General silence. Then Basset rushes over to her and kisses her hand)*

BASSET. My poor dear child.

CLOTILDA. Always kind, Master Basset. There's a tear in your eye! You at least are a man I can count upon.

BASSET. Always, my dear; I consider you as my adopted daughter.

CLOTILDA. For everybody else I am a nuisance, or worse.

EARL *(softly)*. Did anyone hurt you, Clotilda?

CLOTILDA. Since when does it matter?

BASSET. Shameful, shameful.

CLOTILDA. No one raised his voice to protect me—

BARON. It came and went so fast—I—

EARL. Oh, Robert, Baron Theefton, my oldest friend. Mistress Clotilda Bennyworth, daughter of our late chamberlain.

BARON. Honored.

CLOTILDA. I am happy to meet you, my lord. I knew you had arrived.

BARON. And I have heard a great deal about you. Look on me, my dear lady, as a champion ready to defend your fair name against any dastardly imputations.

CLOTILDA. Thank you, my lord.

BARON. The Turks, I assure you, have more than once felt my—

*(Another clamor outside)*

EARL. What now? What now?

*(The baron and Basset rush to the balcony. Their backs are turned to Clotilda and the earl)*

EARL *(who is standing near Clotilda, pathetically)*. Clotilda . . .

CLOTILDA *(fiercely)*. Kiss me.

BASSET *(leaning over the balcony)*. What happened? Leofa, I see you! What happened? I'm holding you responsible! You were dispersing five minutes ago. What did you say?



*(Meanwhile the earl, one eye to the balcony, embraces Clotilda with passion and reluctance)*

CLOTILDA. Again. Villain! Again. Coward!

BASSET. Speak up down there!

A VOICE. It's the unicorn!

BARON *(turning about, but the earl has jumped away in time)*. Another killing!

EARL. Another one?

BASSET. I am afraid so. The man Leofa is coming up.

BARON *(joyously)*. And here comes my Lady Margaret.

EARL. I don't want to know what happened.

*(Enter Leofa, a ruddy man of the people)*

LEOFA. She done it again, and here she is, the vamp, and she done it again. Your lordships, I saloote you with respeck.

BARON. Who is this oaf?

LEOFA. This oaf is sincerely yours, Leofa, the People's Delegate, and I ain't come to see your worship but the Earl of Dumfrey, head of the legally constitooted government of this here earldom.

EARL *(weakly)*. Well, I insist that you speak courteously to everybody in this room, and everybody means everybody.

LEOFA. In that case and speakin' courteously to everybody in this room, I announce that your lady's favorite foal, my lord, was gored till death ensued a half hour ago, and standin' for the people I say that if it wasn't for the unsavory likes of her, *(pointing to Clotilda)* still speakin' courteously to everyboy, we wouldn't have no bleedin' unicorns running through the edibles of the land. The people has spoke.

EARL. The white foal is gored?

LEOFA. Yes, sir. Till death ensued.

CLOTILDA. Is that all you can think of, my lord, a stupid horse, while this baboon stands here insulting me?

EARL. I'm sorry . . .

LEOFA. "Baboon" is undemocratic.

BARON. I'd gladly have one of my footmen thrash him, madam, but alas, I came here practically unattended, and my position prevents me from doing it myself.

LEOFA. Excuse me, sir, but no stranger 'as the right to thrash the common people; that's the prevocative of 'is own dooly elected government.

BASSET. All right, Leofa, but you've gone too far this time. What on earth has Mistress Clotilda got to do with the unicorn? You know as well as I do that the unicorn appeared weeks before she—to make a long story short, one thing has nothing to do with the other. I have explained the logic of it a dozen times.

LEOFA. Nevertheless we the people has got a feeling that wickedness and wickedness goes hand in hand.

BASSET. What wickedness? For the life of me—use logic, man!

LEOFA. Logic is all right for them what can afford luxuries. The people has got feelings, and the feeling today is that it's time the land was purgated. We demand morality in 'igh places. And there's some in our midst that mutter still worse.

EARL. What do they mutter?

LEOFA. I'm not with 'em, mind you, I'm just reportin'.

EARL (*anxiously*). Well, out with it.

LEOFA. Look at 'er smilin' while the people manhandle her. Anybody but a witch would have a good cry and run for her life. That's what some of 'em are sayin'.

CLOTILDA. Will you tolerate this, my lord?

EARL. Certainly not.

BARON. Scandalous!

LEOFA. I was only reportin', your lordships, and all inside the circle of respect I owe to one and all.

BARON. The ruffian!

BASSET. Here's half a crown, Leofa. Now go away.

LEOFA. You're a sensible man, anyway, Master Basset. I meant no 'arm. Hoo, here's Lady Margaret now; watch your manners, everybody.

(*Enter Lady Margaret*)

LADY MARGARET. Simply incredible!

EARL. We've heard the news, my dear.

BARON. My dear Margaret, I was struck dumb. Your favorite foal.

I feel as though a child of mine had been gored. I could weep.

LEOFA. Me too.

CLOTILDA. Please accept my condolences, Lady Margaret. (*Lady Margaret snubs her*)

LADY MARGARET (*to the baron*). Thank you, Lord Theefton. Peacefully at pasture she was, in the innocent blue of the day: then all of a sudden gored to oblivion. Is there a God, I ask you? As for Lady Ann, she has simply taken to her bed. What do you mean to do about it, Umfrey? The cup is overflowing at last.

EARL. I'll call another meeting of the council—an urgent session.

LADY MARGARET. I give up. And why is this peasant allowed in the castle? Mud wherever he has set his boots.

LEOFA. Honest earth, madam.

BASSET. That's enough, Leofa. Out you go.

LEOFA. The people condole, madam, but they want a return to morality, and causes removed. Your lordships—

(*Exit*)

LADY MARGARET. Something to drink, if you please. I can't breathe.

(*The baron rushes a refreshment to her*)

BASSET. If only people were a little kinder. I speak in general.

CLOTILDA. If they were kinder to defenseless girls.

LADY MARGARET (*under her breath*). Hah, this is too much! (*Aloud*) Umfrey, a person doesn't know where to turn anymore. Do you realize that I saw Princess born and that I could practically *talk* to her? It's as if the only creature who ever loved me had died.

EARL and BARON. Come now—really!

LADY MARGARET. Honest animal affection, without deceit, without secrets.

EARL. Still, you have your Garden of Exotics to distract you, my dear. (*He nudges the baron*)

LADY MARGARET. The simple love of an uncomplicated beast.

BARON. I've longed before everything to be allowed a peek at your famous garden, Lady Margaret. These violent plants, these poisonous flowers, these crawling grappling choking vines—what splendid lessons they teach us.

EARL. You really must show them to Robert, my dear. It will take your mind off the tragic event. And the best time is now.

BASSET. It is indeed, my lady.

LADY MARGARET. Are you really interested?

BARON. Interested—interested—? Lady Margaret, a higher gratification mortal man could not endure.

LADY MARGARET. Very well. (*In a different tone*). Yes . . . ! It *will* distract me a little.

EARL. And by tomorrow, after my nap, you will see measures taken. An iron fist—

LADY MARGARET. Yes, dear. Call your council again. The unicorn will be terrified. Follow me, Lord Theefton.

(*The two leave. There is a moment of silence. Churchbells ring*)

BASSET (*glancing out of a window*). Another penitential procession. The good people assembling before the church.

CLOTILDA. The good people. I still shudder at the words I heard. They're ready to burn me as a witch.

BASSET. My dear Clotilda, no harm will come to you, believe me. The people are a little excited, of course. But I myself, with my lord's permission, stand between your innocence and the world. And I sincerely hope that Lord Dumfrey is your protector as well.

EARL. Of course, of course.

BASSET. My lord, I am going to speak frankly before Clotilda. I am disappointed in—how shall I put it?—in your inaction.

EARL. I am calling a meeting to—

BASSET. No, my lord, you know perfectly well that I am not talking about *that* inaction, but about your immobility with regard to my adopted Clotilda. (*The churchbells ring again*) She is being treated rudely—beyond toleration—by the common folk in the streets—and by other persons—of higher rank—in this very room, I'll make bold to say—but, be that as it may, I look in vain for a firmer stand on your part, a public declaration of your faith in the young lady's innocence. Listen to these bells, Lord Dumfrey. Think of your father who wore the cross under the gates of Jerusalem. Think of the founder of your line who baptized the savage Saxons. Think of our faith in you, and then call out to the people, "As you love me and as you take pride in my righteousness, thus shall you believe in her chastity!"

EARL. Why doesn't lightning strike me now?

BASSET. Strike *you*, my lord? Our beloved ruler?

EARL. Stop, stop . . .

BASSET. Have I said too much?

EARL. Too much, oh too much! I must speak . . .

CLOTILDA (*frightened*). Umfrey!

BASSET (*staring at Clotilda*). Umfrey?!

EARL. Basset—Clotilda—I warned you many times—it can't be hidden forever! My righteousness, her—! Daggers into my flesh! Basset: Clotilda and I—I and Clotilda—yes—

BASSET. No.

EARL. Thank God, I've told you, of all men. I feel better already, but the unicorn is my fault, I bear the guilt. I know I'm not the only transgressor in the land, but I am the ruler, in me it counts more heavily. What can I do? I am bewitched by the poor girl, I tremble when I see her—love and desire tear me to shreds, I wrong my wife, my innocent wife, but the perfection of her form—the enchantment of her knee—ha! it's out at last!

CLOTILDA. Umfrey, this is too much!

EARL. Madness, yes. But I shall make you see it. (*Holding on to Basset*) Not the face all roses in a bath of milk. Not the nose drawn by the divine Geometer. Not the hair that swirls when it is loosed at night like ravens in a storm. Not the love-wise

hands. Not the billowing breasts. Let them be. I can force my eyes shut to them. But oh her knee—

BASSET. My lord—let me go! No more, no more!

EARL. No, you'll stay to the end, I'm emptying my depravity into your soul—(*to Clotilda*) Step into the light! I demand it! Ah! That pouting walk! But I can shut my eyes to it. Obey me, Clotilda. Raise your gown.

BASSET and CLOTILDA. No!

EARL. I say yes! At once! Not so high, you witch! Down, down, stop! Look, Basset, look! Look at the dimple just underneath her knee! Look at it smile at us, look at the imp, the rogue, the darling!

BASSET. This is a dream. . . . (*He gestures feebly at Clotilda, who angrily drops her gown again*)

EARL. When I see—what you just saw—I become helpless—insane—oh Basset, I know I am the most hell-ridden man of the kingdom.

CLOTILDA. So! Now your steward knows it all. I hope you're happy. But what good it will do me I don't know.

BASSET. I wish I had died ignorant of this. I who loved and respected you, my lord. Knees, ravens. . . .

CLOTILDA. Umfrey, you've gone too far this time. Out of respect for me, you might have defaced me behind my back.

BASSET. I'm in a daze. Allow me to sit. . . . Bennyworth! My lord, you knew all the time—to put it mildly!—and yet when Bennyworth made his daughter look for the unicorn, you relented and let her go.

EARL. I had no choice! I would have insulted the poor misguided man beyond recovery if I had refused to send her out. I didn't know then that people would hound her to the stake with evil suspicions. (*Resolutely*) My friend, I have not made my confession in a fit of weakness. Here is my unshakable decision. You shall tell me and Clotilda what to do.

BASSET. Undo the sins you have committed. Be sinless and kill the unicorn. But first, my lord, allow me to speak alone with Clotilda.

EARL. By all means; an excellent first step. Clotilda, see that you obey Master Basset, no matter what.

*(He leaves. Basset looks for words.)*

BASSET. Clotilda, have you ever been to Paris?

CLOTILDA. No, sir.

BASSET. Paris is an extremely remarkable city. Infinitely more diverting for beautiful young women than our obscure earldom of Dumfrey. We have heard of Paris, but has Paris heard of us?

CLOTILDA. I don't suppose it has.

BASSET. Now as my lord's chief steward, I think I can promise you the most comfortable conveyance to the French capital, and the richest entertainment upon your arrival. You will lodge with the Comtesse du Jolimot, who is our blood relation there.

CLOTILDA. Thank you, but no.

BASSET. Why not? Hers is one of the finest houses in Paris.

CLOTILDA. Thank you, but no, I'm not going to Paris, Master Basset.

BASSET. Dresses, servants, balls, opportunities for an advantageous marriage, what more can a girl want? You are an orphan, my dear.

CLOTILDA. I am not leaving the earl.

BASSET. This touches me, Clotilda. A charming first love! It is something I respect and even envy a little, being an old man. But alas, my child, you cannot love the earl without wounding his wife.

CLOTILDA. His wife! It's a pleasure to wound her, it's my one consolation.

BASSET. Isn't she a little jealous of you? Even without knowing? These are feelings that bestir themselves within us sometimes before our conscious minds are alerted. But let us leave Lady Margaret aside. You are harming the earl, you are harming yourself, and didn't your hidden deeds help bring the curse of the unicorn on our heads? Because the earl is right. The sins of the great weigh more heavily. Believe me, my child, you will

love again. It seems impossible to you now, you feel that all you possess of love has gone irrevocably to his lordship, but you will be surprised, I promise, one year, two years from now, (*Clotilda yawns discreetly*) when you discover that a new power to love has replaced the old; the dry well has slowly and imperceptibly replenished itself. Go, my child, leave us for two months, try, and then we shall consider again what to do.

CLOTILDA. No, Master Basset, your words sound like a very beautiful book, but I am attached to the earl; here I am, and here I stay. I have my reasons.

BASSET. Something I don't know? Are you—?

CLOTILDA. No I am not.

BASSET. Anything else? This amazing passion—

CLOTILDA. Why amazing? I love the earl, I am all his, he is mad about me, and I won't budge, I am going to make my way right here.

BASSET. Make your way?

CLOTILDA. I mean, love where I love.

BASSET. But suppose a terrible scandal breaks out?

CLOTILDA. I don't care.

BASSET. How can that be?

CLOTILDA. Please, Master Basset, you who handle deeds and contracts and settlements all day long! The earl loves me so tremendously, and I love him too with all my might, isn't he bound to do something for me? Even if there's a scandal? Especially if there's a scandal?

BASSET (*groaning*). Heavenly angels . . .

CLOTILDA. Now you'll go and misunderstand me again. I would die for the earl, I'd do anything for him, I'm sure I can never love anybody again, exactly as you said, but I'm an orphan, you made a very special point of that yourself. Who knows what would happen in Paris—the earl might forget me—no—I don't like to gamble.

BASSET. Whereas here you hold the trump card in your hand.

CLOTILDA. Here I know the rules of the game.

BASSET. What are you hoping for?



CLOTILDA. As the earl's mistress—

BASSET. Brazen girl!

CLOTILDA. I don't care. I have my dreams. My mother lived in the attic. It was a well furnished attic but still it was an attic. I shall have my own manor. My children will bear titles.

BASSET. And what, young lady, if I report your cynical words to the earl?

CLOTILDA. Oh Master Basset . . .

BASSET. Oh Master Basset isn't going to help you.

CLOTILDA. Yes he is. Lord Dumfrey knows that you want to separate me from him. When he sees my tears and hears from me how much I love him, how helpless I am against well-meant slander, he'll know that you are tampering with the truth in order to help him out of his sins. But if he does believe you—

BASSET. You'll threaten to make a public scene, you'll set the world on fire.

CLOTILDA. I didn't say it. But he stands to lose more than I. An orphan has to protect herself. Everybody hates me.

BASSET. What an orphan! If your father could see you from on high! Poor Bennyworth!

CLOTILDA. Leave him to me!

BASSET. And poor Lady Margaret! I have heard too much today. Peter! What now? What now?

*(Enter Peter, holding a gored sheep in his hand).*

PETER. The last sheep of the earl's last flock.

BASSET *(sinking into a chair)*. I am no longer surprised.

## ACT TWO

(*The hothouse: Lady Margaret's Garden of Exotics. Lady Margaret is guiding Lord Theefston*)

LADY MARGARET (*snipping a leaf off a flowering plant*). It has the softest fur. There. (*She rubs it against the baron's cheek*)

BARON (*ravished but nervous*). Amazing. Yes. Again . . .

LADY MARGARET. Isn't it?

BARON. Yes. One hardly—it's altogether . . . What is the plant?

LADY MARGARET. The *Kalosperma impudens*.

BARON (*wiping his brow*). *Kalosperma* . . . How do you do. (*He titters*)

LADY MARGARET. Observe its flower. These long supple filaments, reaching anxiously over the corolla.

BARON. What are they, Lady Margaret? I am full of scientific wonder.

LADY MARGARET. They are simply the stamens.

BARON. Oh yes.

LADY MARGARET. The male organs. The flower is a sexual animal, why deny it? Even we women learn to speak with erudite detachment, we name the parts, we observe the actions—well, perhaps we do feel a tiny shiver trespassing on our composure—but we no longer blush—that is the beauty of science.

BARON. Admirable . . . Science doesn't blush . . . (*He feels the stamens with his palm*)

LADY MARGARET. They tickle. (*He giggles*) Look close. (*She bends close to him over the flower*) Each filament bears its bud, swollen, distended with the male particles, the pollen, and waiting for a touch to break open, and to pour itself out. Poof!

BARON. The little rogue!

LADY MARGARET (*moving to another flower*). And yet this one is even more fascinating. Really shameless. Look at this elongated pistil, erect in the calyx. For a flower!

BARON. Yes, for a flower—quite shameless—does it—

LADY MARGARET. We call it the *Priapisca vehemens*. But I'll surprise you, my lord. This is a female flower.

BARON. This? This . . . thing? Female?

LADY MARGARET. Nature is a brawl, a tumult, Lord Theefton. Expect anything. The pistil contains the flower's womb. Feel it. Do, my lord.

BARON. Almost—ye gods—

LADY MARGARET. Like flesh. (*The baron wipes his brow*) When the plant is ready, when the time of desire comes upon it, the time of fruition, why not call it the time of love—

BARON. Exactly—the scientific term.

LADY MARGARET. The pistil grows, it lifts itself stiffly and yearningly, it seeks and we might even say it calls for the pollen, namely through the perfume it secretes. There is no modesty, no hypocritical reticence here. Come to me, the flower cries. I want you to stroke the tip with your finger, Lord Theefton.

BARON. Oh!

LADY MARGARET (*laughing warmly*). What you feel is the pistil's secretion over its thousand fine hairs—the damp warm cushion which retains and sucks in the pollen. As for the pollen itself—but you're uncomfortable, my dear friend, your face is flushed—perhaps—?

BARON. No—not at all!—Margaret—Lady Margaret—go on!

LADY MARGARET. I hardly know—should we?

BARON. Yes yes! You were saying . . .

LADY MARGARET. Something about the male granule that lies here. Suddenly it wakes into activity, it sends a long slender finger deep into this pulp until it meets the ovule in its sack. And there the impregnation occurs, the sweet consummation blessed by Nature.

BARON. Dear Nature! (*He leans over another flower*)

LADY MARGARET. Not so close, my lord!

BARON (*jumping*). What did I do?

LADY MARGARET. You were inhaling the *Iasonus sceleratus*. Some say one shouldn't. . . .

BARON. Shouldn't? Why not?

LADY MARGARET. Its perfume . . . What shall I say? . . . The Persians chew its petals for—for unmentionable purposes. It seems to me that merely breathing it—(*She breathes it*)

BARON (*weakly*). Merely breathing it—like this—

LADY MARGARET (*weakly*). The people call it St. Anthony's bane.

BARON (*weakly*). St. Anthony's bane?

LADY MARGARET (*weakly*). They say that St. Anthony himself couldn't have resisted the fragrance. Even I . . .

BARON. Even you? . . .

LADY MARGARET. Perhaps I shouldn't have come so near. If only . . . But we must be detached, we must.

BARON. Must we? Margaret . . .

LADY MARGARET. And yet, if one could be like this exotic twiner—the *Lekkerkuss gloriosus*. Watch the curling tendrils, see how they reach out towards a stem as if in adoration—and when they find it—

BARON. And when they find it? What then?

LADY MARGARET. They grasp it quickly, violently—because they are fearless—because they know no law or prohibition—because they need—need—need—and what they need—

BARON. They take!

(*He flings himself on Lady Margaret and kisses her passionately*)

LADY MARGARET. My lord!

BARON. Margaret! My Margaret! I am your tendril! I need you and I take you!

LADY MARGARET. Robert!

BARON. Yes, call me Robert, and you—my love, let me kiss you again, my flower, my nectar, my perfume—

LADY MARGARET. Robert, if I had known . . . What is happening? Where am I? Robert! Since when?

BARON. Since always! Can you ask? I could bear it no longer at Theefton. Surely you know why I came here. The unicorn was a pretext. Too many years had gone by—oh Margaret, Margaret, Fate came between us.

LADY MARGARET. Not so loud, my dear, hush, there are people nearby.

BARON. My goddess, confess it now that you love me—oh these blessed flowers—you answered my kisses—you didn't thrust me away—you wanted me to grasp you in my arms—"what they need, they take."

LADY MARGARET (*weakly*). No, Robert . . . I meant the plants . . .

BARON. Didn't we play together as children, years before Umfrey saw you, and hadn't we celebrated a solemn mock wedding in the rose garden, you were eight, I was nine . . .

LADY MARGARET. How was I to know this meant anything to you? Or that you'd remember these childish promises?

BARON. Oh Margaret, that was the culmination of my life—at nine—I have remembered nothing else. You were my wife from that holy afternoon forth. You the heiress of Wyngham, Brigsley, Tuckbetter and Glaswin Epton, I the future Baron Theefton—our lands, too, lying amorously flank to flank. But then—miserable times—you were orphaned; King Stephen gave you to Umfrey—to my friend! He an earl, I his vassal. I bowed, I wept, I withdrew, I decayed. But now—look down, ye gods, Margaret is in my arms again.

LADY MARGARET. A married woman, Robert.

BARON. Bitterness! And I must think of you lying in his bed at night—or day!—oh God—

LADY MARGARET. You mustn't torment yourself, my dear; and you needn't. But hush, we were looking at my specimens. My lovely flowers, my only consolations . . .

BARON. Wait, Margaret. You said "you needn't." Why "you needn't"?

LADY MARGARET. It must have escaped me. Don't probe, Robert, for the sake of our happy childhood. Leave an aging woman to tend her griefs alone.

BARON. Griefs? You *will* tell me! I'm on fire, I could smash walls with my bare fists, I am Hercules, confide in me, here, rest your marvelous head on my shoulder.

LADY MARGARET. Oh Robert, if only I had a trusted friend.

BARON. Look at me. I would leap into a gulf full of crocodiles to rescue a hairpin that belonged to you! Tell me, tell me what it is that weighs on your soul, beautiful Margaret.

LADY MARGARET. Hide my face . . . Robert, listen . . .

BARON. Speak to me.

LADY MARGARET (*in a whisper*). I am not my husband's wife.

BARON (*astounded*). What are you? Who is your husband's wife? Tell me! (*Softly*) Tell me, do. Who is his wife?

LADY MARGARET. Clotilda.

BARON. Clotilda Bunny, Benny—the girl?—

LADY MARGARET. Yes.

BARON. Is his mistress?

LADY MARGARET. His wife.

BARON. I'm lost. Are they secretly married?

LADY MARGARET. No, they are not married, and yet she is his wife, and his only wife.

BARON. His only wife! And you?

LADY MARGARET. I am the maiden Countess of Dumfrey.

BARON. Maiden!

LADY MARGARET. Maiden.

BARON. And I am Robert newborn, newborn this instant! I am forming my first thoughts on this earth! I will liberate you! Before God, you are not married, and never were. You revert to me! Exact an annulment at once.

LADY MARGARET. Umfrey will fight it. He has my lands, Robert, he is in love with my lands.

BARON. Villain! I had forgotten your lands.

LADY MARGARET. I could prove his—but that's too loathsome—a medical inquiry—reports to the Pope—

BARON. Odious! I forbid it. But something must be done! I am lashing my brain. Sooner or later it will produce ideas. It always does.

LADY MARGARET. I have had years to produce ideas.

BARON. Margaret! Your eyes tell me you have found the way.

LADY MARGARET. Perhaps. The way—a difficult way—I would need all your courage, your—

BARON. —love! My love! My invincible love! Into my arms! (*He kisses her*) Use me, I am nothing except the extension of your thought and the execution of your will.

LADY MARGARET. Dear, dear Robert. Could it be that we are meant to be happy yet?

BARON. Here is my oath. By all the saints, Robert shall be twined about Margaret like the—name it for me, my soul.

LADY MARGARET. The *Lekkerkuss gloriosus*.

BARON. Amen. Now; what must I do?

LADY MARGARET. Patience. You do nothing at first. The first action is mine, and I have the courage for it at last. Oh I was so miserably alone!

BARON. Angel!

LADY MARGARET. But now all is changed. I shall go into the forest with a mirror in my hand—

BARON. And hunt the unicorn! Divine virgin, the unicorn will be yours. How did I fail to think of it! You will capture the unicorn, you of all maidens will not fail! For God rewards the innocent. And the world will know that you are no man's wife. Your false husband will be unmasked. The false marriage will be dissolved. Margaret and her true Robert will be joined, stamen to pistil. The archbishop will bless their union. And happiness seasoned with revenge shall fill the bowl of our lives. My wife! (*They embrace*)

LADY MARGARET. Be careful! Somebody is approaching. It's our steward. Here is a little door. Do nothing, and above all, say nothing to anyone; leave everything to me.

BARON. I will, I will. Once more? (*He offers to embrace her*)

LADY MARGARET. Patience.

(*With a finger across her lips, she leaves*)

BARON (*alone*). Heavenly Margaret is mine! Wyngham's grazing lands are mine! The mills of Brigsley are mine! Tuckbetter's corn is mine! The waters of Glaswin Epton are mine! Glaswin

Epton, where Ecgfrith defeated Wulfhere in the year 671, and where Theefton overthrows Dumfrey today. Baron cuts down earl, oh savory hierarchical revenge, and even better, I best my best friend. I can't stand the joy of it, I want to write epics, I could drink the North Sea, I'll sneeze a mountain away. Whom can I tell? Halloo, here comes the dear honest fellow—Ralf Basset, here I am, were you looking for me?

*(He sings)*

This way, fair maiden, to your lover's arms.

*(Enter Basset, very glum)*

BASSET. I was looking for Lady Margaret.

BARON. The divine Margaret has just left, after giving me a lesson in rare plants I shall never forget.

*(Singing)*

This way, fair maiden, to your lover's arms;  
Your lover with impatience sighs.

BASSET. You seem very happy, my lord.

BARON. I seem because I am and I am because I love.

BASSET *(more glum than ever)*. You too. The place is being smothered with love. *(Sarcastically)* I suppose you'll tell me that you're in love with Lady Margaret, who has adored you since childhood.

BARON. How in the devil's—*(putting his hand over his mouth)*

BASSET. What??! I was joking!

BARON. Ha ha ha, you drew it out of me without even trying! No, Basset, you were not joking, it's the power of your famous honesty, my friend, it gives you prophetic gifts in spite of yourself. Extend your hand to the happiest man in Britain!

BASSET *(pulling his hand away)*. Is this *your* joke?

BARON. Joke? Let the world hear it is no joke. I mean to proclaim my love from this *Priapisca lekkerpuss* to the farthest star, not forgetting the Earl of Dumfrey on the way.



BASSET. I'll be insane before the day is out. However, love as much as you like, my lord; congratulations; but I trust my poor Lady Margaret has sense enough to see with her own eyes the difference—I say no more.

BARON (*stung*). Don't, my friend, because you happen to be right again, I return the congratulations; she does see the difference with her own eyes—and with her own fresh lips—and with her own plump arms—here in the greenhouse she saw it ten minutes ago.

BASSET. Lady Margaret?

BARON. Lady Margaret.

BASSET. I don't believe it. But I admire your telling these stories to me, who have served Lord Dumfrey from the time he was a child.

BARON. Why shouldn't I? I know enough to freeze you all in your shoes. I have plucked the secrets of this house. I was not in the diplomatic corps for nothing. I served in Norway.

BASSET. Bluff. You know no secrets—there are no secrets to know.

BARON. My dear Basset, your loyalty amuses me. But I know as well as I hope you do what connection exists between Lord Dumfrey and the sham virgin Clotilda.

BASSET (*astonished*). Who told you?

BARON (*laughing*). An angel—Lady Margaret.

BASSET. She knows? She knew? And she told you?

BARON. She knows, she knew, and she told me.

(*Singing*)

Your lover with impatience sighs.

Fair maiden, swiftly yield your charms—

Hmm, that heavenly fragrance. Marvelous flowers—the Arabs chew them for—unmentionable purposes. I must have them at my wedding. Yes, Basset, I have culled the secrets of this house. Your loyalty is useless. Remember, I am an old hand in statecraft. I know who is the true virgin in this house, and I know who is the false virgin.

BASSET. I don't follow you.

BARON. Useless discretion. At the hour of my choosing, the public will be invited to inspect Umfrey's bedchamber. And I shall address them as follows: "Your master, good citizens and reverent judges, has failed to perform his conjugal duty even once in the five vacant years of his spurious marriage. Here, however, is Mistress Clotilda." And all the rest. Oh, you and I could chat like old friends over a tankard of ale. Don't stitch up your lips on my account.

(*Singing*)

Fair maiden, swiftly yield your charms,  
Else your woeful lover dies.

BASSET. Excuse me. . . . Failed to perform? . . . Lord Dumfrey?

BARON (*suddenly solemn*). A crime, Basset; his soul and body are sold out to that witch Clotilda. Because of his greed for land and yet more land he tears Margaret from the bosom of her dotting parents. Then he violates the sacrament for five unholy years—refuses to consummate—allows her to wither. Thank God the poor orphan preserved her purity, which now devolves on me.

BASSET (*weakly*). How, on you? What do you intend to do?

BARON. That is my secret. But as sure as the Pope and King Stephen are alive, Margaret will be mine, along with Wyng-  
ham, Briggsley, Tuckbetter, and Glaswin Epton.

BASSET (*flaring up*). This is plunder! Wyng-  
ham, Briggsley—vulgar  
plunder!

BARON. Vulgar?

BASSET. Why didn't I see it before? The unhappy woman looking for comfort, staggering in the darkness, and stretching out her innocent hand to a smiling claw! However, there's still Ralf Basset. I'll make your designs public, Baron Theefton.

BARON. Piffle. Say one word, and I fling your master to the mob. But you misunderstand me. My designs are pure. I love Lady

Margaret. We played together as children—this is sacred—I knew her long before Umfrey set eyes on her—we had exchanged oaths in a bower, she was seven and I was eight, the spirits of the woods were undoubtedly listening, we were Aeneas and Dido, only younger; the nymphs and the goblins declared that we should ultimately be united; for these lands, I ask you to note, these lands border upon mine, they are my natural extension. I am amputated without them.

BASSET. They also border upon this earldom.

BARON. But they bordered on me before Umfrey knew Margaret. No, my good Basset, this is the beginning of my ascent. The Theeftons are destined to eclipse the Dumfreys. Three weeks and two days after I was born, a bolt struck down the church steeple in Dumfrey Bottoms. The heavens don't speak in vain.

Dame Fortune can whirl  
Baron to Earl,  
And one more fluke  
Turns Earl into Duke.

Shall I make cottage laws, do cornfield justice, educate muddy-shanked milkmaids and build rotten windmills when I could be multiplying my estate and branding my name into the chronicles?

BASSET. My lord, I ask you to excuse me. You want no company just now to keep yourself entertained.

BARON. Wait. Let's be friends, Basset; I'm in a temper to have no enemies; may the sun shine on all men alike. Perhaps you should do something underhanded too, like the rest of us sinners. I think you'd feel more at home among us if you did.

BASSET. In plain words, are you suggesting an alliance between yourself and me?

BARON. Why not? I need good men. The Theeftons are obviously in the ascendant. And your master is beyond help. Oh you can warn him about me—much good may it do him! I'm galloping into the future; saddle your horse and ride after me before I'm out of sight.

BASSET (*going*). Excuse me.

BARON. Right you are; time to join our good friends again. I promised Umfrey I'd go trotting with him about the countryside. We might catch a glimpse of the unicorn. (*He laughs and puts his hand on Basset's shoulder*) Coming, Basset?

BASSET (*disengaging himself*). I was about to forget—I promised Lady Margaret to label a few of her plants. Go without me, my lord.

BARON. I will. Think of the Theeftons while you label away.

(*He leaves singing*)

BASSET (*watching him through the window*). Ruffian! Dancing down the path. What now? He's stopped by the roses. Plucks a rose and puts it in his sleeve. Sting him? Not Theefton it wouldn't! Theefton is in the ascendant! Ha! He's leaping over the hedge with his arms out like a pair of wings! Enough, enough. (*He turns away and sits on a stool*) I've lived too long, I've heard too much . . . Poor Lady Margaret, poor suffering woman . . .

## ACT THREE

(*Same as Scene One. Next evening. The room is even warmer and more lovely in the evening than it was during the day. The Earl, the Baron, and Clotilda are playing cards*)

EARL. Don't we need more lights?

BARON (*ogling Clotilda*). Not in the least. This half darkness is enchanting. It sets a man dreaming. Perhaps a lady too?

CLOTILDA (*flirtatious*). Ladies have to be careful about dreaming, Lord Theefton. I open with six.

BARON. Charming!

EARL (*annoyed*). Well, I think it's getting too dark. Peter! More lights.

BARON. Three of spades.

CLOTILDA. I take two. My lord?

EARL. Snip with a jack.

BARON. Not bad. Another card for me.

(*Enter Peter with lights*)

EARL. Set them here, Peter. Is Lady Margaret still up and about?

PETER. I believe she has retired, my lord, but I'm not sure. Shall I inquire?

EARL. No, never mind.

PETER. Thank you, sir. (*He leaves*)

CLOTILDA. Double-hook and beat seven. Your turn, my lord.

EARL. Oh yes; I flip a queen of hearts.

BARON. I pass.

CLOTILDA. My lord?

EARL. Oh, one whisket with the king.

BARON. I place five in a dash.

CLOTILDA (*triumphant*). Snip-snap!

EARL and BARON. Again!

EARL. The pot is yours, my dear.

(*Clotilda rakes it in and carefully puts the money in her purse*)

CLOTILDA. You're allowing your minds to drift tonight, gentlemen.

EARL. Oh, I don't know.

BARON (*ogling Clotilda*). I plead guilty. My mind is drifting, guess where? Mistress Clotilda, your bracelet is a marvel. May I?  
(*He leans over her forearm*)

CLOTILDA (*charmingly*). Do you really like it? It's perhaps too brilliant for an orphan. A friend gave it to me. A *former* friend.

BARON. A friend who would resign himself to being your former friend, Clotilda, must be an unfeeling clod.

EARL (*extremely annoyed*). The game's over for tonight and thank God it's almost time for bed. Margaret must be waiting up for me.

BARON (*sarcastic*). Impatiently, I'm sure.

(*Enter Basset, carrying papers*)

BARON. I say, Basset, won't you take Lord Dumfrey's place at the card table?

BASSET (*grimly*). No thank you. I am working on the Dumfrey tercentenary celebrations.

EARL (*gloomily*). Celebrations.

BARON. They'll cheer you up, Umfrey. Your house is almost as ancient as ours of Theefton. That's something to be proud of.

BASSET. A couple of minstrels have asked to be heard tonight, my lord. As they looked hungry, I took it upon myself to say yes.

EARL. A little music before bedtime can't do any harm. Or maybe it can. What else, Basset?

BASSET. Nothing, my lord. Leofa is in the kitchen, grumbling among the cooks and the maids.

BARON. Why don't you hang the rascal, Umfrey?

CLOTILDA. That's what I would like to know.

BARON. I don't tolerate grumblers on *my* lands.

EARL. Good. But I'll thank you not to hang my taxpayers for me.  
(*Sound of the unicorn*) Oh my God, listen!

BARON. Fairly close, I'd say.

EARL. Merciful heaven, take this plague away and forgive us our sins.

BASSET (*muttering*). Deserve it first.

EARL. What did you say?

BASSET. Nothing, my lord. Allow me to work quietly in a corner.

EARL. In the dark?

BASSET. The darker the better.

(*The unicorn's trump again, now very close indeed. Everyone is startled*)

EARL. Listen! The beast is in my park! Practically under the window! Robert, go see—Basset—

(*The baron and Basset go to the balcony*)

EARL. This is for my sins. Witch! And flirting under my nose. But I'm sending you away.

CLOTILDA (*flaunting her dimpled knee*). You'll never send me away!

EARL (*covering his eyes*). I will, I will!

(*Exclamations from the balcony*)

BARON. There! There! By the hedge! Beyond the basin!

EARL. What? What do you see? Basset!—(*Enter Basset*) Your face is white. What did you see? Don't tell me—

(*Clotilda runs to the balcony*)

BASSET. My lord—the unicorn—

(*Scream from Clotilda*)

EARL. What? What?

BASSET. Go look—

EARL. I don't want to.

(*The baron enters, followed by Clotilda*)

BARON. The unicorn is caught!

EARL. Who—?

BASSET. Your wife . . .

BARON. Caught by Lady Margaret! Caught by a virgin! Tremble, Lord Dumfrey!

(*The earl is dumb*)

CLOTILDA. This is a dirty scheme to ruin me, Umfrey! Your wife is leading in the unicorn and holding up a mirror as though she had caught him.

EARL (*choking*). Where is she going?

CLOTILDA. Nowhere. She's coming here. This is a plot devised against me.

BARON (*with a laugh*). On the contrary, my dear Clotilda; we're going to help you; be patient.

BASSET. He knows everything, my lord. So does your wife.

EARL. How? . . .

BARON. Brace yourself, Umfrey. Your unmarried wife has confessed herself to me. Leofa is in the house. Capitulate, or in a few minutes your People's Delegate will trumpet the news that Lady Margaret is a virgin.

EARL. Capitulate?

CLOTILDA. Hypocrite—viper! Umfrey, do something!

EARL. The world is coming to an end. How does Robert come into this? How did Margaret—? Explain, somebody, for the love of God! And why does this blackguard keep chuckling in my face?

BASSET. My lord, I too know more than what you chose to tell me. You kept the worst from me. Your neglect of Lady Margaret. The unhappy woman wants to save herself from all of you—villains—yes—I open my mouth and cry villains. You Lord Dumfrey—a shameful alliance—you Clotilda—

CLOTILDA. Nobody wants your sermons. Do something, Umfrey. She's in the house now with the unicorn.

BARON. There's nothing to do for anyone.

BASSET. You—manipulating Lord Dumfrey to serve your ambition. And you, Lord Theefton—

BARON. I'm a guest.

BASSET. Playing with Lady Margaret's affections to swallow her estate—

EARL. My lands! He wants my lands! Never!

BARON. Too late, Umfrey, Margaret is mine!



EARL (*drawing his dagger and going for the baron*). Not for long.  
(*Clotilda screams and Basset interposes*)

BASSET (*loud*). Who are you to punish a man, sinner? (*The earl's arm falls*) There is only one innocent being here—your wife—fumbling to save herself from the wolves!

CLOTILDA. Fiddlesticks!

EARL (*sinking into a chair*). Where is she? Go look, somebody . . .  
Oh God, what have I done with my life? Robert, what have I done to you?

BARON. You have done that you stole Margaret from me.

EARL. Deep corroded villain!

BARON. I love her, she loves me, we were pledged to each other years before you knew her—I was twelve, she eleven—children, pure and prophetic. All is fulfilled. Umfrey, the time has come to yield up your so-called wife, declare the so-called marriage null, and restitute the lands you took from her. If you refuse, out with it all, the whole revolting story, your sordid affair with Clotilda—

CLOTILDA. Protect me!

BARON. All of it conveyed to King Stephen. You'll roll from your chair of state straight to the Tower.

CLOTILDA. I'll be with you to the end, Umfrey. Only you and I.  
(*The door opens. Enter Lady Margaret*)

EARL (*with his last breath*). Where is the unicorn?

LADY MARGARET. In the wardrobe. (*She shows a key*)

EARL. Who saw you?

LADY MARGARET. Nobody.

EARL. Who saw the unicorn?

LADY MARGARET. Nobody.

EARL. Leofa? The porter? Peter? The maids?

LADY MARGARET. Don't be a bore, Umfrey. I said nobody.

BARON. Margaret. Heroine!

LADY MARGARET. Not yet.

BARON (*low*). But why at night? Why in scret? I don't understand.

LADY MARGARET. You will.

BASSET. My dear lady, are you quite safe? Did the beast try to harm you?

LADY MARGARET. Thank you for asking, Basset. I had a moment of terror, for he was growling and ready to thrust at me. But I held the mirror steadfast, and lo! he became meek, and gently followed me. I have not even a stain on my dress, not a spot on my hands, nor a wrinkle in my purpose.

BARON. Miraculous woman.

EARL. Margaret, speak to me . . . I *am* concerned for you . . .

LADY MARGARET. And I for you, my husband. I set you free to marry Clotilda.

EARL (*groaning*). You knew.

LADY MARGARET. From the start. (*Clotilda faints*) The little toad has fainted; Umfrey, you know the rules of chivalry; help your mistress.

(*Basset attends to Clotilda*)

EARL. Margaret, I don't want to be set free. I was bewitched. You belong to me.

LADY MARGARET. You mean Wyngham, Briggsley, Tuckbetter and Glaswin Epton belong to you.

BARON. Precisely.

EARL. This is unjust. We've lived together for five years—peacefully—you accepted my deep respect—you can't wish a scandal to break over my head, surely.

BARON. What scandal? We'll do it quietly.

EARL (*furiously*). Stay out of this, mongrel—

BARON. By thunder, I'll call Leofa! Here I fret over your reputation—

CLOTILDA (*who has come to again*). Umfrey, my dearest love, listen to him, do as they say, we're powerless against them . . .

BARON. That's a sensible girl. She's all yours, Umfrey. You can afford to marry whomever you wish, you're not a lowly baron afraid of a misalliance—a man like you is immune to whispers. Take Clotilda—the poor girl loves you and you're ever so devoted to her. Nobody will be told that Margaret caught the

unicorn, it could have been the work of a stray virgin happening by—why! the unicorn could have drifted into the wardrobe by himself. Leave it to my diplomatic experience. All that's required of you is a friendly settlement with Margaret, a donation to the church, and a gift to the Pope—I have it! you'll send him the unicorn's tusk in a velvet case—and the story ends with toasts and violins.

EARL. I'm dizzy.

CLOTILDA. Here, my dear; let me take care of you. (*She tries to give him some wine*) You see, the evil wind has blown some good to us after all.

EARL (*weakly*). Go away . . .

LADY MARGARET (*offering her hand to the baron*). Umfrey, listen to me.

BARON (*devoutly*). My own!

BASSET (*throwing himself at Lady Margaret's feet*). Dearest lady, listen to me, listen I beg you, don't take refuge with Theefton of all men! If you knew his real purpose!

BARON. Brace yourself for a flood of slander.

BASSET. Your husband has done you an immense wrong—I know it—but he repents—look at his face!—while Theefton comes here lusting only after your land—he told me so himself—

BARON (*laughing*). Told him so myself! Very likely! Congratulations on your mouthpiece, Umfrey—he deserves his wages—but here, thank God, no one is dumb enough to believe him.

LADY MARGARET. Rise, Master Basset, rise. *I am dumb enough to believe you.*

EARL and BARON (*contrasting pitch*). Margaret!

BASSET. Lovely lady, I've opened your eyes. I've saved you.

EARL. At least you've seen through this puppet. So far I'm happy.

BARON. Margaret!

LADY MARGARET. I see through all of you.

BARON. This is a dream. Margaret! I adore you. You fell into my arms yesterday afternoon—

EARL. That's a lie.

LADY MARGARET. Thank you, Umfrey.

BARON. Why did you hunt the unicorn?

LADY MARGARET. In order to crush you all. Basset, you didn't open my eyes. I know how to open them on my own, thank you. I understood Theefton's greed from the beginning. He stole my favorite puppy when I was ten.

BARON. He ran away! Finders keepers!

LADY MARGARET. And I knew my husband's deceit, and I knew Clotilda's ambition. But I waited for my day. Which came. Now I shall make you all cringe. Umfrey, choose; either you drive your mistress out, come to my bed, and give me my rights as Countess of Dumfrey, or else I leave you demolished in your ruins and marry myself and my lands, eyes wide open, to your enemy Theefton.

BASSET. She loves her husband, you see!

LADY MARGARET. My friend, you'll die the same baby you were born. But phrase it as you like, I'll love my husband, so be it, from the moment he does my will, my justice, my good. And do or don't, by all the saints in paradise who have witnessed my patience—

EARL. What, my dear?

LADY MARGARET (*fiercely*). I'll be avenged!

BASSET. God destroy me!

CLOTILDA. Protect me, my lord. Show her what you are. Protect the defenseless.

LADY MARGARET. Peter!

(*Enter Peter*)

PETER. Madam.

LADY MARGARET. Warn Leofa to be here in exactly ten minutes; not nine and not eleven; ten minutes from this. (*She snaps her fingers*)

PETER. Yes, madam. (*He leaves*)

LADY MARGARET. All right, Umfrey.

EARL. Clotilda will leave.

CLOTILDA. Oh!

BARON. Wait! You're not rid of me yet. Umfrey, I order you to keep Clotilda. Like it or not, Margaret will be Baroness Theefton.

LADY MARGARET. I will be Countess of Dumfrey, like it or not. Countess!

BARON. Baroness! Umfrey, once more I order you to keep Clotilda. Or else Leofa, the people and the king will be told how you and Clotilda have broken the sacrament, poisoned the land, and inflicted the unicorn on it. I will ruin you. You will end your days on a pallet in King Stephen's clammiest dungeon. Robert Theefton has played his trump card.

LADY MARGARET. And what if I refuse to become your mate? What will you have gained?

BARON. Vengeance. Like yourself.

LADY MARGARET. What if, instead of vengeance, I were to offer you land?

BARON. Land? Where and when?

LADY MARGARET. Tuckbetter and its corn; at once.

BARON. Hm.

LADY MARGARET. Besides, remember where you are.

BARON. Where I am?

LADY MARGARET. Namely in Lord Dumfrey's stronghold, with few retainers at your side.

EARL (*delighted*). That's true. I'll try him on the spot for treason against the earldom, and have his head before he can open his mouth.

CLOTILDA. But I'll cry his story from the rooftops.

LADY MARGARET. Shut your mouth, my child; we'll come to you in a minute. Well, Robert? Think of the scaffold. And think of Tuckbetter's cornfields.

BARON. I'd prefer the mills of Brigsley.

EARL. They're yours.

BASSET. Oh God, destroy me!

LADY MARGARET. Allow me, Baron Theefton. (*She pours him some wine*)

BARON. Thank you. Political questions can always be settled, provided there's a little good will all around, a touch of genuine sincerity. Here's my hand, Umfrey.

EARL. What about the falling into your arms yesterday afternoon?

BARON. A diplomatic fiction.

EARL. Here's mine. Briggsley is yours. Basset will draw up the charter tomorrow in good Latin. And Margaret—Margaret—come here—my wife—(*kissing her hand*) a great stone has been lifted from my chest. The earldom is saved, my soul perhaps too.

CLOTILDA (*throwing some pewter on the floor*). Brutes! Brutes! Plotting together to tear me to pieces. But I'll get even with you! Liars! Schemers! (*To Umfrey*) You, I was your slave, I forgot all thoughts of marriage for your sake, I allowed you to wallow in my bed night after night, and how you loved it, how you slavered after me, let the Countess hear it, others can bite too, she's not the only viper, because I'll expose you all, myself too, I don't care. I'll make you repent, Leofa is coming, I'll make you grovel—

BARON. A little reason, Clotilda!

EARL. What shall we do with her? Margaret! I do owe her something. (*He covers his face*)

LADY MARGARET. I agree. The woman who caught the unicorn should be rewarded.

ALL. What?

LADY MARGARET. Why do you look surprised? Clotilda went into the forest early this evening—

(*The door opens; enter Peter*)

PETER. Leofa, the People's Delegate! (*He withdraws*)

LADY MARGARET. Leofa, how good of you to come; come in, come in.

(*Enter Leofa; he kneels before Lady Margaret and kisses her hand*)

LADY MARGARET. Stand, excellent friend, and attend to my words. Mistress Bennyworth left the castle this evening longing to succeed where she had failed before, and anxious to restore her reputation in the eyes of the people she loves. She found the foul unicorn—yes! she caught him; she led him back—

LEOFA. The unicorn is caught! Where is he?

LADY MARGARET. In the wardrobe. And here is the key.

LEOFA (*taking the key*). Heaven be thanked!

LADY MARGARET. Heaven be thanked, of course; but heaven's instrument as well.

LEOFA (*kneeling before Clotilda and kissing her hand*). Mistress Bennyworth, the sweet saints in heaven rain their goodness on your pretty head. Our progenitors will be told the inspirational story of your lily life. You have justified the people's confidence.

CLOTILDA. I've always loved the people, Leofa.

LEOFA. No 'usband will be too great for you. Kings will ask for your 'and from Asia to Constantinople.

LADY MARGARET. That will do, Leofa. Go tell the people the happy tidings.

LEOFA. At once. Long live the house of Dumfrey!

BARON. Amen. (*Exit Leofa*) He's right, Clotilda, you will find a choice husband as soon as the news has spread.

CLOTILDA. Well, I hope nobody here expects me to be grateful. I'm lying for your sakes.

EARL (*low*). Do take the girl away, Basset.

BASSET. No, I am sick at heart. The little hussy. And you, Lady Margaret, cold from your brains to your womanhood. You, Lord Theefton, false friend and plunderer. You my lord, liar and adulterer. And myself, a grey-haired baby.

EARL. I'm afraid we *are* a fearful lot. On the other hand, we're friends again, Basset, and are we any worse than the rest of the world?

BARON. Rather better, if anything.

LADY MARGARET. Look at other places.

CLOTILDA. Paris, for example, where Master Basset has promised to send me.

BARON. Are there not clouds in the sky?

CLOTILDA. Does it not rain in June?

LADY MARGARET. Don't swans for all their beauty honk?

EARL. And didn't Christ himself lose his temper?

(*Enter Peter*)

PETER. The minstrels attend in the antechamber!

EARL. What minstrels?

PETER. The two Master Basset invited, my lord.

EARL. So he did. Well, let them play, let them sing!

PETER. This way, masters; here is a place ready-made for you.

(*Enter a singer and a player. They bow.*)

SINGER. Greetings lords and ladies! We thank you for your welcome  
and hope to please you by performing the very latest ditty  
heard at the court of King Stephen.

(*He sings, with accompaniment*)

When God said  
Let us make the earth  
What did he do  
He took a heap of dirt  
  
He took a heap of dirt  
And made a muddy ball  
And that is why oh why  
We're muddy one and all!

(*Applause*)

EARL. The clever things they think up in London!

SINGER. My lord, it is the custom, in the capital, to dance to the  
song, all in a round.

EARL. We'll dance in that case, and long live King Stephen!

BARON. Hand in hand, all in a round! Mistress Bennyworth, may  
I?

CLOTILDA. Of course.

EARL. Margaret?

LADY MARGARET. With pleasure.

(*The singer repeats the ballad; the player performs, and all dance except Basset who has bitterly removed himself*)

EARL. Enough, enough! Let the ladies breathe! Peter, more wine!  
Ah, my spirits are reviving at last! I propose a toast. Friends!  
We are reconciled!



BARON. Reconciled!

CLOTILDA. Reconciled!

LADY MARGARET. Reconciled!

EARL. Basset, where are you? Hang it, come here; I—

BASSET (*in loud agony*). I am NOT reconciled! (*He rushes to the balcony*) I've had enough! Dance without me!

EARL. Peter, stop him!

(*Peter catches hold of Basset already standing on the balustrade and ready to jump off*)

PETER. Don't jump! Don't disobey Lord Dumfrey!

BASSET. Let me go, for pity's sake! Lie and cheat without me!

EARL. Basset, Ralf my good friend, come away for God's sake. I need you. The land needs you. The world needs you.

CLOTILDA. We all love you, Master Basset.

BARON. I told you yesterday: you're one of us!

EARL. Listen to me. I shall double those acres you own near Pit-marsh.

BARON. Excellent idea.

EARL. And ask King Stephen to make you a baronet.

BARON (*aside to the earl*). Are you mad? His great-grandfather was a woodcutter!

BASSET. Spare me, my lord, let me die.

LADY MARGARET. Stand aside, all of you. Peter, you too, let him go.

EARL. Margaret will do it, of course.

LADY MARGARET. Basset!

BASSET. Yes, Lady Margaret.

LADY MARGARET. Turn around again. Yes, away from me. Look down into the park, look towards the forest. What do you see?

BASSET. What do I see? I see darkness.

LADY MARGARET. Tell me the weather of that darkness, Basset.

BASSET. The darkness is cold.

LADY MARGARET. I felt it too, face to face with the beast an hour ago. The cold of that corpse you seem in such a hurry to become. Tell me, Basset—because *I*, poor woman, don't know—tell me who or what rules over us when we are cold. Is it as the Church teaches us?

BASSET. It is! (*Pause*) I don't know. . . .

LADY MARGARET. Will you fall straight into Hell, having taken your own life?

BARON. Infallibly. Holy Scripture requires it.

EARL (*crossing himself*). God preserve you.

LADY MARGARET. Or will you be scattered into the void? Or is God a unicorn? Or will the angels welcome you after all?

BASSET. I don't know.

LADY MARGARET. And yet you will make that discovery soon enough, Basset; because you are old.

EARL. Margaret . . .

LADY MARGARET. Old, Basset, old. Why such haste? Self-murder is not for the old, my friend; self-murder is unseemly when Death stands at the door uncalled and unaided.

EARL. Margaret will do it.

LADY MARGARET. Turn back to me, dear Master Basset. (*Basset does so*). Oh, I find in your eyes the wish that you could wish to live.

BASSET. You do?

LADY MARGARET. You are looking at me, and what do you see? A wicked beautiful woman. Around my neck and arms jewels happy to circle them. On my body soft silk resting against the softer flesh. In the room warm candles, silver shimmering, homely oak of tables and chairs, foolish deceitful familiar people, and the wine more purple than the grape it came from. And what do you hear, Basset?

BASSET. Human words swimming towards me like a school of sirens singing.

(*Basset reenters the room*)

EARL. A bowl of wine this once, Basset. For a token.

BASSET. I don't know, my lord. I am astray. (*He drinks*)

EARL (*embracing him*). Forgive me, Ralf.

BASSET. I shall try. Pay no attention to me . . .

(*The earl and Basset withdraw to one side of the room*)

BARON. Lady Margaret, my hat is off to you.

CLOTILDA. I have always admired you so much. May I . . . ?

LADY MARGARET (*friendly and regal*). Of course.

(*She offers her hand for Clotilda to kiss*)

CLOTILDA. Thank you!

BARON. My dear Clotilda, you of all people should comfort our desponding steward . . .

CLOTILDA. You are ever so right, my lord.

(*She flies to the other side of the room*)

BARON. Lady Margaret, a word with you.

LADY MARGARET. Yes, baron.

BARON (*low*). Surely you won't allow a steward to turn baronet for trying to jump off a balcony?

LADY MARGARET. Don't be apprehensive, Robert. The king will laugh in my husband's face.

BARON. Well . . .

LADY MARGARET. And if he doesn't, keep something else in mind.

BARON. Namely?

LADY MARGARET. There is rank and rank. Rank of the money-bag and rank of the sword. Rank of today and rank five hundred years old. Rank ridiculous and rank sublime.

BARON. Margaret—*dearest* Margaret. . . . (*He turns*) I say, Basset, allow me to be the first to—

(*Leofa rushes in, holding a gored chicken and rabbit in his hands*)

LEOFA. My lords, treason, a new unicorn in the woods!

ALL. Oh!

LEOFA. Look! Gored, gored again, everything is starting all over again. When will it end? Lord Dumfrey, say something!

EARL. I'm calling a meeting of the council tomorrow! (*General hilarity*) I'll name a commission. . . . I'll launch a massive inquiry. . . . Basset—Master Basset—suggest something.

BASSET (*bitterly*). Keep dancing! Keep dancing till doomsday!  
(*Hurrahs and bravos*)

EARL. What shall we dance?

BARON. I propose the Ballad of Sir Blot, and all of us together!  
Can you play it, lads?

SINGER. Of course, my lord; the Prince of Wales danced it to our music last month and gave us a guinea for it, he was that pleased.

EARL. Well then, play it for us, and let the ladies lead.

SINGER. Take your places, your worships; and each one his turn.

(*The players strike up the music. The others sing and dance*)

SINGER. The Ballad of Sir Blot!

LADY MARGARET. Sir Blot, come hither and declare aloud,  
"I am a landlord rich and proud."

EARL. I am a landlord proud and rich,  
Ten serfs relieve me when I itch.

CLOTILDA. Sir Blot, come forth and say with me:  
"To dukes and kings I bend my cunning kn

BARON. The knee I slyly bend to dukes and kings  
Is bent to me by trembling underlings.

LADY MARGARET. Sir Blot, who is the lucky maid you'll wed  
And tumble in your bouncy bed?

BARON. The lucky lass I mean to marry  
Must bring me field and mine and quarry.

SINGER (*breaking in*). Sir Blot, proclaim both left and right,  
"I slew the unicorn tonight."

EARL. I hate to boast, and fibs I scorn:  
Yes I slew the unicorn!

(*Laughter, more music and dancing; exclamations and applause ad libitum, during which Master Basset stealthily leaves the room*)

EARL. Lively work, minstrels! But enough for now. I feel the breath of midnight in the land. We thank you, lads. Sir Ralf will give orders for a warm supper below, clean bedding, and something for your purses tomorrow morning.

SINGER. Our humble thanks, my lord.

LADY MARGARET. Where is Master Basset?

EARL. He was here just now!

PETER. My lord, Master Basset withdrew while your worships was dancing.

LEOFA. So 'e did, I seen 'im slink off lookin' like 'e'd swallowed a rat – no offense meant to nobody.

BARON. I never saw such aversion to merriment!

EARL. Well, call him back, Peter; tell him he is wanted here.

PETER. Very good, my lord. But here he comes.

*(Enter Master Basset, carrying a pilgrim's staff, a scrip, and a thick leather-bound folio. Everyone stares. He walks up to the earl)*

EARL. What does this mean, Basset?

BASSET *(offering the folio)*. My lord, Lady Margaret, your next steward, whoever he may be, will find the accounts of the estate in order.

EARL. Where are you going? Put those damned accounts on the table.

LADY MARGARET. Master Basset wishes to leave us.

BARON. What on earth for?

LADY MARGARET. What on earth *from*. Is it not so, Master Basset?

BASSET. It is, madam. You never fail. As I believe you know, the abbot of Newminster is my cousin on my mother's side. I shall ask him for shelter. Allow me to take my leave.

EARL. Certainly not! In the middle of the night! I do not allow it!

LADY MARGARET. And neither do I.

BARON. Obedience, my worthy friend.

CLOTILDA. Do remain, Master Basset; I shall continue to need your guidance.

EARL. As for the unicorn, Basset, you know how it is, the beast will be migrating in good time to other shires. Read the chronicles.

BASSET. Let it go where it pleases, my lord; I shall not hear it in my cell.

EARL. Your cell is in this castle, Basset.

BASSET. Thank you, Lord Dumfrey, but no.

EARL. But yes!

THE PLAYERS (*striking up*). Yes, yes, yes!

BASSET. No!

ALL (*except Peter and Leofa, who are watching*). Yes, yes, yes!

BASSET. No.

ALL. Yes!

BASSET. No!

ALL. Yes!

(*All this in the figure of a dance, and dancing to their Yes and his No they pull him along and leave, accompanied by the musicians. Peter and Leofa remain alone on stage. Peter stretches his body to listen*)

PETER. What in the devil's name was the last word, yes or no?

LEOFA (*busy wrapping the chicken and rabbit in a tablecloth*). How should I know? And what's it to me? Hey! Looks like their lordships left most of their wine in the cups. That's nobility for you.

PETER. Yes no yes no yes no. Now I'll worry and worry.

LEOFA. What do you think you'll do with all that wasted wine twiddling its thumbs in there?

PETER. What did you say?

LEOFA. I asked, what are you going to do with all that wasted wine?

PETER. I don't know. (*Drinking*) Here's what.

LEOFA (*falling to*). That's my boy. Here's how.

PETER. Don't touch the decanter.

LEOFA. What do you take me for? An anarchist?

PETER. Never mind. Why don't you tell me what you're going to do with *those*?

LEOFA. Those what?

PETER. Those chicken and rabbit.

LEOFA. Give 'em to the wife for cooking, what did you think? I've got five children to feed.

PETER. And the holes?

LEOFA. Dummy! I've got 'oles in my shoes, 'oles in my pocket, 'oles in my roof, there's a steady dumb 'ole in my stomach, and another waiting for me by the church. Why should I mind a hole in my boiled chicken? Drink up.

*(A unicorn is heard in the distance)*

PETER *(shaking his head)*. Might as well.

LEOFA. Cheers!

*(The unicorn once more)*

PETER. Who am I to argue? *(With a sigh)* Cheers.

*(They clink and drink up)*

# **WATER FROM AN ITALIAN PUMP**



**CHARACTERS**

PETER MANDOLINO

DELANCEY KROTT

VITTORIA GRAZZI

TIM NETHERGOOD

ANGELA DANONE

**PRODUCTION NOTE**

Mandolino, Krott and Nethergood pronounce the Italian words and names correctly, while Vittoria and Angela speak them with an American accent. Physically, I imagine a huge Delancey Krott towering over a slenderly built Mandolino, but other choices might be effective too.

## SCENE ONE

*(An average college office in New York City. Peter Mandolino, a mild assistant professor who puffs conscientiously on the standard academic pipe, is laboriously calculating grades and entering them on an official form.)*

MANDOLINO. An eight, a seven, B+ on the final, here we go. *(He enters a grade)* Ay! Here comes Meadow. *(He stares gloomily at his grade book, scratches his cheek, fiddles with his pipe, mutters to himself, and finally picks up the telephone and dials a number)* Registrar's office? Let me talk to Mrs. Perkins, may I? Thank you. . . . Mrs. Perkins? This is Mandolino in the Italian Department. . . . Fine. How about yourself? . . . Oh my God! In the Catskills? How awful! What kind of snake was it. . . . Ha! And where did it bite you? . . . I see. Lucky it wasn't worse. Still, two weeks in bed. You can't be too careful when you go hiking—ever since the Fall, you know. . . . No no, the fall of Adam and Eve is what I meant—the serpent—that's it, an academic joke! You see, I've made you laugh, I bet it hurts less already. . . . Hm. . . . My, my. But what did your laryngitis have to do with a snake bite, Mrs. Perkins? . . . They *collided*! Incredible. But I'm glad you're on the job again. . . . No, don't worry, I'm not the tramping type, I'm the swim-in-the-ocean sort, a regular dolphin. . . . Yes. . . . Good for you. . . . Well now, what I'm calling you about is Jim Meadow. . . . That's right, who else? What am I supposed to do with him. . . . I mean, he's come to class six or seven times all semester, he wobbles in with a weird, glassy stare, barefoot of course, I'm sure he sleeps in his clothes, such as they are, there are congregations of things in his beard, live or dead, I don't know, and—frankly, I've got to open the windows—I do it unobtrusively, but—yes, yes, that's right, no, you're right—he hasn't taken a single exam or handed in a single paper, I know it looks like a clear case, I flunk him and that's

it. . . . What's that?. . . . I agree, but on the other hand—he's bright—very bright—he's read Pirandello on his own. . . . Pirandello, never mind, what I mean is, he's promising, he'd be somebody if somebody would wean him from those drugs. . . . Yes, a glassy stare, grey cheeks, and he wobbles. I suppose it's one of those chemicals, frankly I can never remember their names, the kids inject them — into their arms, isn't it? . . . *Where?* . . . I'll be damned!! . . . No, I'm not shocked, not at all! Facts are facts, I agree. And the stuff moves *up* into their system?. . . . What do you call it?. . . . Well, I'm not going to try to remember, they seem to change the slang every two weeks. . . . Right, right. So that's what they're up to, or down to. Still, I'd like to give Meadow a chance. How is he doing in Dr. Nethergood's class? (*Someone knocks at the office door*) Hold it. Come in, come in! (*Enter Vittoria Grazzi*) I'll be right with you. Sit down. (*Into the telephone*) Excuse me, Mrs. Perkins, a student just walked in. . . . Well then, if it's all right with you and Mr. Simpson, I'll give the boy an Incomplete. . . . Fine. And keep away from those reptiles! . . . Bye bye! (*To Vittoria*) Will you excuse me one moment?

VITTORIA. Oh sure! (*She is shy and pleasantly plain*)

(*Mandolino enters Meadow's grade and turns amiably to Vittoria while cleaning out his pipe*)

MANDOLINO. Now, what can I do for you?

VITTORIA (*shyly*). I'm one of your students, Dr. Mandolino. I sit in the back row of Italian Five.

MANDOLINO. I know. Your name is Vittoria Grazzi.

VITTORIA (*delighted*). That's right!

MANDOLINO. And you want to find out your grade.

VITTORIA. Oh no—

MANDOLINO (*looking into the grade book*). A very commendable A minus, Miss Grazzi. You don't make a lot of noise in class—I mean, you don't "participate"—but at least you recognize an irregular verb and you nail it down.

VITTORIA. I'm very anxious to improve my Italian.

MANDOLINO. Well, you're improving it.

VITTORIA. In a few weeks I'm going to have a chance to put it to practice.

MANDOLINO. Fine! You're going to Europe?

VITTORIA. Yes—I'm going to Europe. That's why I'm here, Dr. Mandolino. I was wondering whether I could talk to you about my trip.

MANDOLINO. Certainly. Do you plan to spend most of your time in Italy?

VITTORIA. Oh, of course.

MANDOLINO. Visiting relatives, I suppose.

VITTORIA. Yes—most of the time, I guess. But—well, my relatives—that's the really important part of my trip—it's—a mission, you might call it. But they live in such a tiny place—

MANDOLINO. Where is it? What's it called?

VITTORIA. I'm sure even you have never heard of it. It's called Acquaviva and it's kind of in the Deep South of Italy, but one of my cousins is going to meet me in a place called Campobasso—I'm afraid it's all rather complicated. Am I taking too much of your time, Dr. Mandolino?

MANDOLINO. Not at all! I'm interested.

VITTORIA. Thank you. As I said before—I didn't come in to inquire about my grade. I knew I'd done pretty well on the exam—

MANDOLINO. Good girl!

VITTORIA. It was a very fair exam, I thought. But I was hoping you might give me a few tips, a few hints about travelling in Italy—you've talked so much about your experiences—you've seen it all!

MANDOLINO. Babblemouth Mandolino!

VITTORIA. Oh no! Everybody enjoys hearing your stories. They make a language class come alive. They're *really* helpful.

MANDOLINO. Thank you.

VITTORIA. Oh, I didn't mean—Anyway, I'm going to have a good three weeks, or even a month, to run around the country by myself—I want to see everything that matters—and, to be perfectly honest, I don't think my relatives will be much help—they've never even been to Rome.

MANDOLINO. It's a rough life people lead in those stony villages. I've driven through a number of them, and stopped in a few. The old women in perpetual black—they mourn for thirty years, so of course they're always in mourning for somebody. The mule clomping uphill with a man riding sidesaddle. The old villagers under the trees with their hats on, staring at the outsider in the foreign car. Sure, they read the papers—mostly gory tales of jealous husbands shooting their wives—they listen to their radios—but the world abroad registers deep inside them like legendary material – or daily entertainment. Americans, Russians, China, Arabia, India—it's all real, but a reality so distant that it acquires the charm of fiction. The real truth is those stooped backs and that tough sun over the fields.

VITTORIA. It'll be strange for me.

MANDOLINO. Stranger for them. Suddenly, out of the newspapers, the radios, the television set in the only bar in the village, out of all that quasi-fiction, you manifest yourself in three-dimensional glory, carrying your Macy's suitcase, and holding forth about subways, Fifth Avenue, your dates. You'll be using a weird vocabulary for them—"I'm majoring in Italian"—"I have a job in summer camp"—"we meet at the Mall"—stuff that seems ever so average to you.

VITTORIA. It'll be wild.

MANDOLINO. And better be tolerant as far as the plumbing is concerned.

VITTORIA. *They're* terribly worried.

MANDOLINO. But what about that mission you were talking about?

VITTORIA (*shyly*). You didn't read about it in the school paper? There's a copy on your desk.

MANDOLINO (*picking it up*). I haven't gotten around to it. Why here's a picture of you! "Vittoria's Mission to Italy." Sounds like the State Department is sending you!

VITTORIA (*laughing*). Oh no. It's all in the family. I know I talk too much about it. Everybody and his kid brother knows by now. But it's all so important. To me. Not to anybody else. I'm not *that* silly.

MANDOLINO. Tell me all about it. It may help me give you the right sort of advice.

VITTORIA. Well—I'm a kind of emissary. There's a lot more to it than what it says in the paper. I must carry a great deal there, and bring a great deal back. Mostly feelings. And symbols. It all began long ago, when my father came to this country, long before I was born. He left Acquaviva with his older brother, I guess they were both in their early thirties. It was the usual story. No future for them in Italy.

MANDOLINO. They did well in the States?

VITTORIA. Oh yes! No, not really. That's why I'm the one who is going to Italy.

MANDOLINO. I don't understand.

VITTORIA. Well, when they left Italy—my uncle and my dad—they left their parents behind, naturally, but also two little sisters, much much younger, kids. My father loved them, he loved them so much—

MANDOLINO. Are they alive?

VITTORIA. Oh yes. My grandparents are dead, but my aunts are alive. Only, my dad never saw them again. For years and years he and my uncle worked as hard as they could—the idea was for dad to return to Italy, first to see their parents again, if only once, but then they died, two years apart, and there wasn't enough money to go—and then, now I remember, the news came too late both times—I remember seeing my father cry when I was hardly more than a baby, it frightened me terribly.

MANDOLINO. What did your uncle and your father do here?

VITTORIA. Same thing they're doing now—they opened a little restaurant—at first they were waiters, dishwashers, cooks—but they finally managed to open a place of their own—a couple of years before I was born—and they've had several places since—one at a time, of course.

MANDOLINO. Which one is it now? Maybe I've eaten there.

VITTORIA. It's called Da Giorgio, on Thirteenth Street, between Seventh and Eighth.

MANDOLINO. No, I guess not.

VITTORIA. It's not at all well known.

MANDOLINO. So your father never made it back to Italy.

VITTORIA. No, he didn't. First he got married, then he had all of us children—

MANDOLINO. A dozen, I suppose!

VITTORIA. No, only five.

MANDOLINO. Only five!

VITTORIA. Two boys and three girls. And then trying to get the business on its feet. All these years, though, he kept putting away a few dollars at a time in a special account—it was his great secret—even mother didn't know about it. Suddenly last Christmas he said: "There it is! Enough for one ticket to Acquaviva!" And then he got drunk for the first time in his life. You don't know what it meant to him. His sisters . . .

MANDOLINO. Don't apologize. I'm with him all the way.

VITTORIA. The one thing he still wanted out of life, he said, was to see the little girls again.

MANDOLINO. Not so little anymore.

VITTORIA. No. They're both married, and they look pretty stout in the photographs, and I've got more cousins than I can keep straight in my head.

MANDOLINO. But now *you're* going. What happened? Nothing to your dad, I hope.

VITTORIA. No. I can't explain it. He went to the travel agency right after Christmas. When he came back, he sat down at the kitchen table and said nothing for an hour. That was the end of his trip. Too many years had gone by. Thirty years. He couldn't go.

MANDOLINO. You accumulate so much emotion, you're afraid that when it all gets released, an explosion will tear you apart.

VITTORIA. We couldn't get him to explain. He kept shaking his head, and all he ever said was, "next life, next life."

MANDOLINO. And that's how you inherited the ticket to Italy.

VITTORIA. There was a full family reunion. We have them every now and then—both families, wives, children, cousins, everybody. My father said, “The money’s in the bank. Who’ll go? I’m not going, and I need mother at home, my heart ain’t what it used to be; who’ll represent me?”

MANDOLINO. Why not your uncle?

VITTORIA. No, Uncle George never cared to go back. “If they wanna see me, let them come here like I did.” It’s funny. My dad says Uncle George beat the old country off the soles of his shoes the day he left, while dad sort of scraped it lovingly off and kept the bits of earth in a box. One part of my mission is to bring back a bottle full of water from a pump in the village where he used to wash his face and drink after playing with the other kids.

MANDOLINO. Customs shouldn’t object to *that*. Anyway, you were elected.

VITTORIA. I’m the youngest, and the only one going to college. There was a great weighing of “factors”—it’s a word dad happens to like—and all “factors” considered, it looked as if I should be the one to go.

MANDOLINO. Were you happy?

VITTORIA. Was I happy! All my life I’ve dreamed of it! I guess when a person has gone as often as you have—but for me—and I never thought it would happen—not for many years—and then suddenly the secret bank account—and father—I feel as if I were living in a movie. I’ve been preparing for months.

MANDOLINO. I’ll do my best to help.

VITTORIA. I would have asked you before, but at first I didn’t even know whether I’d have time away from my mission.

MANDOLINO. I’m glad you’re taking it seriously.

VITTORIA. I suppose it sounds stupid—but I feel as if I’m carrying something sacred in my two hands—my father’s heart—across the ocean—like a cup that I’ve got to empty where he was born, and fill again, and bring home to him. I suppose I’m horribly sentimental.

MANDOLINO. Like your dad.



VITTORIA. I guess so. But I'm not hopeless, you see, because here I've gone and made lots of room for "culture" and fun like any other girl.

MANDOLINO. Where do I come in? The culture or the fun?

VITTORIA. Anywhere you like!

MANDOLINO. That's good. You can count on me for guidance; I love to give advice on travelling.

VITTORIA. Wonderful.

MANDOLINO. Frankly, that's one of the great rewards of travelling abroad: badgering others with information, ostensibly for their good, actually to display one's own feathers.

VITTORIA. I'm glad I'm doing you a favor! I was afraid I'd be imposing.

MANDOLINO. Let me get a few items together for you—books, pamphlets and maps—some of the material is at my fiancée's house—and let's make an appointment. When do you leave for Europe?

VITTORIA. In a month.

MANDOLINO. Good. That gives me all the time I need. Shall we say in exactly two weeks, same time, same place?

VITTORIA (*writing it down*). That's perfect.

MANDOLINO. Okay?

VITTORIA. Okay. And thanks a million!

MANDOLINO. See you in two weeks.

VITTORIA. I'll be here. Bye-bye.

(*Mandolino waves to her as she leaves. He goes back to his grades, broods over his pipe, mutters to himself*)

MANDOLINO. Carrying something sacred in her hands! College kids! (*His eyes light on the telephone*) Hey, I wonder. . . . Hm. . . . (*He hesitates, then takes the plunge and dials a number*)

Hello? Mrs. Flanagan? This is Peter Mandolino, how are you? . . . Good. Is Delancey in his room?. . . Aha. . . I see. . . Ttttt, that's terrible. But I know Delancey, I'm sure he'll pay within the week. You know how writers are, Mrs. Flanagan, erratic but beautiful. . . Oh. . . Ink on the wall?. . . Ttttt, that's really—though I think there's a new cleaning fluid on the market. . . Oh, of course. . . Of course. . . I *know*. You're practically a mother to him, Mrs. Flanagan, letting him use the shower and all that. He's terribly fond of you. . . Okay, I'll wait. (*A pause. To himself*) I hope I'm not making a mistake. Hi, Delancey. . . Fine. How about you?. . . Asleep, at this time of day? I don't believe it! . . . Thank you, she's fine too. . . No, we didn't decide last night, how many times do I have to tell you? Ethel and I will get married the moment we *can* get married, and that's the end of that. Let's change the subject. The reason I'm calling is this. I guess it's crazy, but one of my students was telling me a story five minutes ago—something charming out of her own life—and suddenly I thought of you telling Ethel and me last night that you're desperate for a one-act play. Maybe this is it. . . No, not over the telephone, it would take too long. . . Don't rush me! I'm not skipping town with your plot. Anyway, it may be of no use to you, how do I know? You're the playwright. All I know is that it's a wonderful story. . . Psychological interest? Don't ask *me*. I teach Italian grammar, remember? But listen. I'm meeting Tim Nethergood for lunch down in the cafeteria at noon. . . Nethergood. I don't think you know him. The Rise and Fall of Phallic Imperialism. . . No, you clown, it's a course he teaches in Women's Studies. Why don't you come over to my office right away, I'll tell you the story and then the three of us will go down for lunch together. I want to talk to Nethergood about a stu—. What's that? . . . *You*, lunch with Ginsberg? . . . You must be dreaming. . . That's one producer who. . . Do I have to tell you that a man you've struck with a scoop of lemon sherbet is bound to resent it? His girl will tell you he's out having a heart attack. Okay. . . That's better. . . Don't worry, I'll treat you. Don't I always?

But hurry up, will you? I have a class at two. . . . Okay, okay.  
(*He hangs up, returns to his grades, and scratches his head with his pipe*) I bet I made a mistake.

## SCENE TWO

*(Mandolino's office)*

KROTT. A bottle full of ancestral water! I'm not going to survive this. You sneaked up to that telephone on purpose to fell me with the bullshittiest story that ever befouled my ears. A bottle full of village water! A virgin on a sacred mission! Tender reunion of sundered families! Where have you been all your life, you suffix, you pleonasm, you expletive! Get out into the cold world, hit the streets, you pipe-puffing, tennis-playing professors!

MANDOLINO. We will. But Nethergood is waiting. I'm hungry and I've got a meeting at two.

KROTT. He's got a meeting at two! To discuss next year's allocation of paper-clips. Twelve professors, frowning gravely, assemble to make the fatal decision.

MANDOLINO. I told Nethergood—

KROTT. And me what do you tell? He calls me over with urgent syllables, causes me to trip over a fox-terrier and two innocents pushing a soccer ball over the pavement, I arrive at his desk wet with expectation, I know my Redeemer cometh, my play is a wind between his rosy lips, and then crunch, he flattens me with a tale of lollipops and teddy bears, confident that I can never set pen to paper again.

MANDOLINO. I was trying to help.

KNOTT. Penis envy! That's what it is. The green worm scrounging at your entrails ever since we sat together in Bliffin's creative writing class twelve years ago, and while I triumphed with brutal pictures of life in the dank ghettos of New York, you wrote accounts of "My Afternoon at the Metropolitan Museum." The virile erection of my genius clobbered your subconscious. You fed the green worm under the Poison Tree while conjugating the palest irregular verbs you could find in your listless grammar books. Until at last you heard the story of a larmoyant

Italian who longed for a bottle of water from her unspeakable village, and the monstrous thought mushroomed in your mind: Delancey Krott needs a story: with this one I shall emasculate him till the day after the Second Coming.

MANDOLINO. Well, you're always spouting theories about Reality, so I thought here's a real story.

KROTT. You—pitiful subterfuge for manhood—do you dare mention Reality in my presence? Open your blinkered eyes, Mandolino! *This is Reality! (He opens a huge billfold crammed with clippings, which he pours over Mandolino's desk)* Orphans forced to lick their own excrement by sadistic overseers! Massacred civilians discovered in open graves in the jungle! Young girl stupefied by drugs kills four and jumps to her death! Large pharmaceutical firm indicted for marketing dangerous contraceptives! A thousand animal species a year wiped out by man-made pollutants! Three prominent senators and an ex-vice-president accused of influence-peddling in favor of aeronautics firm! Guerrillas mutilate bodies of victims! Outbreak of typhoid fever in famed Swiss resort blamed on criminal silence of local merchants! Three black women beaten to death in tobacco field! Two hundred twenty-nine spectators at football game crushed to death as crowd celebrates victory of home team! National Guard fires on student picnickers! Inflatable plastic genitals on sale in Times Square shops! Sixteen-year-old boy sets fire to his parents after tying them up! Exemplary Rotarian, father of two, goes berserk in beauty parlor and kills eight women under dryers! So much for reality! And if that's not enough to turn your stomach, you'll oblige me by remembering that any day, any hour, mankind can blow itself into oblivion by pressing a single pimple of a button.

MANDOLINO. Well, I don't understand—

KROTT. What you don't understand would fill an encyclopedia, my ablativ boy, but what is it you don't understand this particular time?

MANDOLINO. Well, with all these clippings and all, why do you *worry* about mankind blowing itself up? Why aren't you promoting it?

KROTT. Ha ha ha ha ha! The lad has wit! He dares put together an independent clause! But enough's enough. Give me back my documents. (*He gathers up the clippings*)

MANDOLINO. Here. You dropped the inflated genitals.

KROTT. This, this is what meaningful art is about. The artist is not a clown, he is not hired to relieve bleak executives in need of a giggle. The artist is an executioner.

MANDOLINO. Last night when you told Ethel—

KROTT. Ethel! When are you going to marry that girl, you future conditional?

MANDOLINO. I've told you a hundred times. Until I get my promotion—

KROTT. In seventeen years—

MANDOLINO. I won't be able to support Ethel. She's got her parents to take care of. I can't ask her to pack them off to some dingy asylum. I have to think of all three of them.

KROTT (*gives Mandolino a hefty kiss*). You're an insufferable saint. As soon as my royalties exceed the price I pay for computer paper, I'll take you all to live with me in Vermont.

MANDOLINO. Meantime let's get some lunch for God's sake.

KROTT. Wait! What about my story?

MANDOLINO. What story?

KROTT. The Italian girl.

MANDOLINO. I thought it was no good!

KROTT. Of course it's no good! But I'll make it good. I'll make it real, God damn it. I've promised a play for the Workshop, one hour running time, five actors maximum, ready a week from today. But I'm as dry as a lizard. My most creative hours are spent dodging Mrs. Overdue Flanagan. What's to be done? I'll listen to your pulpy story over lunch again.

MANDOLINO. It's in the school paper, by the way. Why don't you take it along?

KROTT. "Vittoria's Mission to Italy." And here's the face itself, awash with the glories of puberty. Tonight I'll descend like a hailstorm on my keyboard, and tomorrow I'll have the first draft of something that tells it like it is. And that, my half-erased semicolon, is what genius is all about.

MANDOLINO. How about lunch, Delancey? Nethergood is waiting.

KROTT. Are you entertaining me?

MANDOLINO. Don't I always?

KROTT (*on an imaginary drum*). Taram-tam-tam!

(*Exeunt*)

## SCENE THREE

(*An office very much like that of Peter Mandolino.*)

NETHERGOOD (*on the telephone*). But what's the use, Doris?

Everybody else'll be swimming, I'll be the only one holding down the sand, I'll look stupid. . . . I said *I* 'll look stupid, Doris. Why don't you go by yourself, they'll be happy to have you. . . . All right, all right, don't get mad, it's not the end of the world. Everybody knows we're engaged, so it wouldn't look as if nobody wanted you. . . . I can't help it if I don't know how to swim. Mom never allowed any of us near the water. . . . There you go again. . . . I don't care, she raised four kids, not one of whom, as it happens, went bankrupt. . . . I'm *not* being aggressive, Doris, but if you start in on my mother I can allow myself a remote allusion to a cousin. . . . But what's the use if I can't swim? . . . It's not true! Who's self-conscious in his bathing trunks. . . . My arms are *perfect*! Not too fat and not too thin. (*A knock at the door*) Listen, Doris, there's a student at the door. . . . I tell you there's a student at the door! The school year isn't over! (*Towards the door*) One moment, please! (*Into the receiver*) Okay? I'll call you in an hour. . . . All right! You call me. . . . Where should I be? Right here. . . . Good-bye. . . . Good-bye *honey*. . . . All right, but somebody's waiting at the door. (*He sends a dozen kisses through the telephone and hangs up*) Come in, come in. (*Enter Angela*)

ANGELA. Hello.

NETHERGOOD. Oh hello, Miss Danone!

ANGELA. You haven't forgotten our appointment, Dr. Nethergood?

NETHERGOOD. Of course not. Come in, sit down, I've got everything ready for you. (*He exhibits a large folder*)

ANGELA. Oh wonderful. I'm so grateful!

NETHERGOOD. Lists of hotels, good inexpensive restaurants where you *really* meet the natives, some wonderful out-of-the-way



spots, brochures—I like to go to hotels and ask for their brochures—plans, maps, a few guide books. I'm going to send you to places the tours don't know about—the towers of San Gimignano—the Giotto's in Padova—a wonderful Fra Angelico in Cortona—a fantastic pulpit in Salerno—

ANGELA. This is so exciting!

NETHERGOOD. And a few places for sheer relaxation too.

ANGELA. Good! Please tell me where the best swimming is.

NETHERGOOD. Swimming?

ANGELA. Yes, I love to swim, and I want to swim in the Mediterranean once in my life.

NETHERGOOD. Swim with all those brawny and muscled Italian boys, eh?

ANGELA. Why not?

NETHERGOOD. Swim with boys whose arms are not too thin.

ANGELA (*a bit puzzled*). I guess so.

NETHERGOOD. Why don't you look over some of this material, and then we'll talk. We'll talk about swimming.

ANGELA. Wonderful. (*Angela begins to leaf through the brochures, etc., making little comments, while Nethergood hovers about the office. Suddenly he locks the door and places the key in his pocket. Angela raises her head and turns around, surprised and alarmed by Nethergood's action*)

NETHERGOOD. The door is locked. The ritual can begin. The fake skin, the everyday lie, peels off, and it doesn't even hurt.

ANGELA (*frightened*). What do you mean?

NETHERGOOD. I know you, Angela Danone. I know through you. I know past you. I know beneath and beside and above you. (*He walks over to the desk and with a brutal gesture sweeps all the papers to the floor*) You shouldn't have said swimming. Yet if you hadn't said it, you might just as well have said it, because it is all the same. All differences are the same.

ANGELA. All differences are the same. It's so true, isn't it?

NETHERGOOD (*contemptuously*). Giotto in Padova. Screw Giotto in Padova! Look at me! Into my eyes! Tell me why you came here two weeks ago. You think I don't know who you are, or what you are. (*Almost tenderly*) Slut. Aha! I know too much! I've watched too close! But that was the very thing you wanted all along, wasn't it? You've been too successful, that's all. It started as your game, but I'm taking it over. The key is in *my* pocket. When you were baring your thighs for me in Phallic Imperialism as if inadvertently, when you were fingering the crook of your elbow, where the compassionate needle goes in— there! (*He rips her sleeve*) you thought, "Let's see what I can do with him, I'll play my meek-little-sweetie game with him, talk to him about well-behaved journeys abroad to see the cultural monuments, and then, bit by bit, I'll turn him into one of *us*, the damned."

ANGELA. You swine.

NETHERGOOD. There's only one thing you didn't know, sweetie. I was one of you before you became one of us. I liked the little game you were playing. I enjoyed every move. I watched you between Rise and Fall. And don't forget the trump card in my hands: I had access to the files.

ANGELA. This is the ceremony. This is the inner rhythm of ineluctable events.

NETHERGOOD. I knew all about you. Where you lived. The police record. I knew about the uncle. I knew about the aunt in the lock-up. And I knew, sweetie, that you had—a *brother*.

ANGELA. You're bluffing.

NETHERGOOD. Sure I'm bluffing. The brother! The brother whose name was scribbled in all your notebooks. Dear Fabrizio, employed as a mechanic, nothing against him, a steady worker. Fabrizio, I said to myself, Fabrizio, what is the connection between an honest citizen like yourself and the open knees in Women's Studies and the marks in the crook of the elbow? Oh, I was enjoying the game. But why was I playing it?

ANGELA. Why does anyone play it?

NETHERGOOD. Why does anyone play it? I'll tell you why *I* play it, sweetheart. It starts out with a kid's bicycle. A kid who

lives with his mother in a grimy third-story walk-up. With his mother and the cockroaches and the rats and the weak light bulb hanging from a wire. A family. But I was lucky. I could choose any dad I wanted, because there was a new one around on the average every two months. You didn't get bored up there with the rats and the cockroaches and the changing of the guard every two months. But you learned pretty quick to hang on to anything that came your way, which was on the average nothing a year. Follow me? Don't say you follow me. Above all for God's sake don't tell me you follow me. One day, one of the gentlemen gives this kid a bicycle. Imagine! A fancy new bike, chrome handles, shiny blue frame, gears—the kid was ten years old! I guess the dad of the month had made a pile betting on the horses that day, or maybe he wanted something from the old lady she hadn't granted him yet. Never mind. The kid had a bicycle, the first object he'd ever owned that wasn't fit to be thrown on the junk-pile. His first possession. His first pride. He talked to that bicycle. Why not. They talk to a horse when they groom it. The kid talked to his bicycle when he polished it. A bicycle is no dumber than a horse, when you come right down to it. And you don't get to see a lot of horses where that kid was living. Well, for five days that kid had his bicycle. Five days living like an emperor, looking for excuses to mount that saddle. Like forgetting part of the groceries in the store. Or having to consult another kid on a math problem, what's 2 plus 2. On the sixth day, dad got drunk, clouted my mother's face, broke two of my ribs, cracked a window open and threw my bicycle out of it. Sure I had it on the third floor with me. You don't keep a brand-new bicycle in public places around where I lived. Dad of the month went down to give the bike his personal attention after it had failed to pulverize from its fall. And that, ducky, is where I learned to play the game. And the name of the game is Smash it before you get to like it, smash it, baby, before it smashes you.

ANGELA. I knew it from the first time I saw you.

NETHERGOOD. What did you know, honey?

ANGELA. That you and me were on to the same game. Like you

said. Smash it before you get to like it, smash it before it smashes you.

NETHERGOOD. Except I play to win, kid.

ANGELA. So do I.

NETHERGOOD. Don't forget Fabrizio.

ANGELA. What about Fabrizio?

NETHERGOOD. I was going to look for him. Instead, guess what, day before yesterday he shows up here. I sat him here where you're sitting now.

ANGELA. What did he want?

NETHERGOOD. "I'm Fabrizio Danone," he says, "I'm Angela's brother. I want you to talk her out of that trip to Italy. Tell her she'll come down with cholera. Tell her anything." "Why?" says I. "What's the matter?" "She's needed here. Mother and father are both sick (*Angela laughs*) and I've got a full-time job. This is no time for her to go picking daisies in Europe." "You're lying," says I.

ANGELA. You louse.

NETHERGOOD. "I happen to know that your mother and father are in the pink of health. Out with it! Why do you want to keep your sister here, eh? Why do you want to keep your little sister under your thumb?"

ANGELA. You louse.

NETHERGOOD. "Why do you want to keep your sister, eh?" His lips were twitching.

ANGELA. Louse!

NETHERGOOD. "Why do you want to keep your sister? Eh? Eh?"

ANGELA. Louse! Louse! Louse! (*Nethergood grabs her and holds her tight against him*)

NETHERGOOD. Only me, I didn't get upset. On the contrary, I liked it. I liked the idea very much. The more we talked, and we talked plenty, the more I liked it.

ANGELA (*hoarsely*). You don't know about Uncle Pietro yet.

NETHERGOOD. I know all about you and Uncle Pietro. Fabrizio told me. I like that too. Uncle Pietro is trying to get rid of you.

ANGELA (*frantic*). You're lying and Fabrizio *doesn't* know!

NETHERGOOD. You dumb bitch, if he doesn't know, how did I find out? Now I've got you where I want you.

ANGELA. You're hurting me.

NETHERGOOD (*pulling out a switchblade*). It'll hurt more if you don't submit.

ANGELA. What do you want?

NETHERGOOD. What do I want! (*Furious whisper*) Lie down. And say "brother" to me. All the way, from now to climax. Say "brother." Say "brother!"

ANGELA. Brother.

NETHERGOOD. Lie down. On the mat. (*He begins to strip her*) I don't hear you.

ANGELA. Brother!

NETHERGOOD. I'll show you a million stars—*sister*.

ANGELA. Brother!!

NETHERGOOD. I'll make the planets sing for you.

ANGELA. Brother, brother!!!

NETHERGOOD. I'll cram you full of juicy sweets.

ANGELA. Brother, brother, brother!!!! (*The lights go out. A few moments go by. Various noises spread from the floor. Then Angela is heard laughing. As the lights go on again, she is smoothing out her skirt while Nethergood is fumbling at his trousers*)

ANGELA. So much for my little brother! (*She laughs*)

NETHERGOOD. You bitch. A man can't always—

ANGELA. Some can, *tiny* brother. (*She laughs*)

NETHERGOOD. Shut up.

ANGELA. Is something *chronically* wrong, *mini*-brother? (*She laughs*)

NETHERGOOD. Shut up, you bitch.

ANGELA. Don't like what didn't happen, *eenzy-weenzy* brother? (*She laughs*)

NETHERGOOD. Shut up! (*He strikes her violently across the face and she falls back against the desk*)

ANGELA (*complete change of tone*). Oh dear, my stocking! Hold it, Bill.

NETHERGOOD (*complete change of tone*). What happened? (*Delancey appears, script in hand*)

KROTT. No fatalities, I hope.

SARAH. There must be a splinter in this desk—my stocking is ruined.

BILL. I'm sorry. Gee.

KROTT. I'll treat you to another pair, kid, don't worry. (*He embraces her*) You're great, Sarah, great! Bill, you too, absolutely tops, I wish you'd ripped something too so I could replace it for you.

BOTH. Thank you.

BILL. It's a great script, Delancey.

SARAH. I *love* it, I just *love* it.

KROTT. Why don't we take a break and discuss my notes. I've got a couple of beers in the desk drawer. Surprise.

BILL. Resourceful.

SARAH. Just a tiny sip for me, that's all. I've got to watch my calories. Thank you. Can I ask you a question about the script, Delancey?

KROTT. Ask me a million.

SARAH. I'm still a bit puzzled by my motivation. What am I doing in Nethergood's office anyway? Do I *want* to go to Italy or am I faking it? Have I got something against Nethergood? You've given him a chance to explain himself, but Angela doesn't get her turn.

KROTT. Beautiful! You've seen the heart of the lettuce, Sarah darling—you're *sensitive*—exquisite. The confusion is exactly what I want. She has no motivation. Motivation is out. She drifts. She is absurd. In fact, she's not unconditioned enough for me. I'm striving toward metaphysical incoherence as an echo of our social anarchy and the death of feeling in our world. What I'm thinking of is introducing myself in this scene—

BOTH (*unenthusiastic*). Oh?

KROTT. Dressed in my underwear, carrying an umbrella in one hand, and a clock in the other. The author enters mysteriously even though the door is locked, you two remain totally unaware of me, and I intone from Beckett—

SARAH. I'm *crazy* about Beckett.

BILL. Me too.

SARAH. Me too.

KROTT. I intone, "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the gravedigger puts on the forceps." Then I depart. Maybe I enter in the other scenes as well, always the vague threatening figure that no one can see, or rather that no one wants to see. Meantime, Nethergood—that's a real name, by the way, I hope the guy doesn't sue me—Nethergood is laboriously digging into his motivation—

BILL. By way of contrast.

KROTT. Precisely! The utterly unmotivated pitted against the over-motivated—

BILL. I hope the reviewers understand.

KROTT. I urinate on the reviewers. Have I expressed my own inner needs? Yes I have expressed my own inner needs. That is all I want.

BILL. What about Doris? I've been meaning to ask you. Isn't there a kind of discrepancy between that conversation of his with Doris over the telephone—about his mother, about the swimming party—between these things and what comes later?

KNOTT. Ah! But—is there a Doris?

BILL. Ah!

SARAH. Ah!

KROTT. Is there an Angela?

SARAH. Oh!

BILL. Oh!

KROTT. Or is it all a dream, a ritual played off in Nethergood's mind, a myth of compulsive self-humiliation?

BILL. That's the question I keep asking myself.

SARAH. Me too.

BILL. Me too.

## SCENE FOUR

(*Mandolino's office*)

KROTT. Then the knife goes into her belly, again, and again. It's the apotheosis.

MANDOLINO. Poor Vittoria.

KROTT. I'm using a different name, of course. But don't pity her. It's the moment of understanding. And it couldn't have come without that knife. For him, you see, the erect knife—obvious symbol, even a cretin can understand it—that knife is the supreme compensation and fulfillment. It turns out to be his only way of communicating. That, I am saying in effect, is what our culture is reduced to; and my anti-hero emerges as a pathetic signifier, raised to the level of myth, groping for some way, available to him, that is to say to our culture, of *reaching* another human being. As for her—what are you doing, you gross misprint?

MANDOLINO. I'm listening! And filling out an interlibrary loan form.

KROTT. Put that form away! World: take note: Mandolino fills out interlibrary loan forms while Krott is speaking. Take note, and weep.

MANDOLINO. Don't get mad, Delancey. Tell me what happens to Vittoria.

KROTT. Ah, Angela. For her, the supreme moment is what I call an *euangelismos*.

MANDOLINO. An *euangelismos*?

KROTT. An Annunciation. The knife blade is in her womb, you see—and in her, too, is begotten the final understanding, the *Logos* which is Love. I'm thinking of doing an article to prove that *euangelismos* is present in every major literary work. I'll show that serious literature is inconceivable without it. A stupendous idea, eh?

MANDOLINO. I—



KROTT. Terrific, I know. Don't steal it from me, you ambitious lower case.

MANDOLINO. But how are you going to convey all this stuff to Vittoria—or Angela? I mean, with the knife in her stomach and all?

KROTT. All I need is a symbolic gesture from her, or a single word—I don't know yet—something with infinite repercussions, like—  
(*Vittoria Grazzi appears through the open door of the office*)

VITTORIA. Hi!

MANDOLINO (*cordially, getting up*). Hello, Miss Grazzi, come on in.

VITTORIA. I don't want to disturb you—I'm in no hurry.

MANDOLINO. You're not disturbing. I was expecting you, and you're right on the button. Sit down. Do you mind very much my having somebody in the office?

VITTORIA. Oh no!

MANDOLINO. Somebody who wants to meet you.

VITTORIA. To meet *me*?

MANDOLINO. Allow me to introduce. This is Delancey Krott. Miss Vittoria Grazzi.

VITTORIA. Glad to meet you.

KROTT (*kissing her hand*). Delighted to meet *you*, Miss Grazzi. I've been looking forward for a whole week to this delicious *incontro*.

VITTORIA. Uh—

MANDOLINO. Don't be startled, Miss Grazzi. Mr. Krott is a playwright—a *living* playwright. Maybe you've heard of him? The author of *Dirty Toenails*?

VITTORIA. *Dirty Toenails*? I don't—

MANDOLINO. It played off-off-Broadway about a year ago.

KROTT. You're embarrassing your pupil, Dr. Mandolino. The name of Krott, Miss Grazzi, has failed to reach the sprinkled suburbs so far where the elm trees ruffle their verdant robes, but all the same, unknown to you, your destiny and mine have converged and fused for eternity.

VITTORIA (*having fun*). Is he putting me on, Dr. Mandolino?

MANDOLINO. No, he isn't. You're not annoyed, are you? I'll explain everything to you.

VITTORIA. Annoyed? I'm having a wonderful time.

KROTT. And you are *giving* me a wonderful time, dear Angela—excuse me, dear Vittoria.

MANDOLINO. Here's what happened, Miss Grazzi. Except that now *I* feel embarrassed.

KROTT. Shoot from the hip, my boy.

MANDOLINO. I may have committed an indiscretion.

KROTT. The beginning of Art is impudence.

MANDOLINO. But after you told me your touching story about the circumstances of your trip to Italy, I remembered that my friend here—

KROTT. Delancey Krott, no middle initial, amateur cannibal, gigolo by appointment to her Majesty the Queen Mother, and suicide pilot on the Australian glider team.

VITTORIA. He's so funny!

MANDOLINO. I don't think I'll ever finish my explanation.

KROTT. I'll finish it. One, Dr. Mandolino told me your story. Two, I turned it into a play.

VITTORIA (*overcome*). Into a play?

KROTT. Three, I became anxious to meet my onlie begetter.

VITTORIA. A play of your own?

KROTT. The music of my own sphere. Wherever I go in the history books, you will follow as a beguiling footnote in the shade of my text.

VITTORIA. My story will be on Broadway?

KROTT. Not this year. But I'm going to send you four tickets to the Slaughterhouse Drama Workshop, where we're trying out the play, "previous," as they say, "to a Broadway engagement."

VITTORIA. Nothing like this has ever happened to me. Wait till I tell my family!

MANDOLINO. I want to warn you that our friend has taken a few liberties with the story—

KROTT. In the interest of Reality.

VITTORIA. Oh, that's fine with me.

MANDOLINO. Delancey is not concerned with anecdotes—he reaches for the essentials of life.

KROTT. The luridly dripping gut.

VITTORIA. How exciting! But you didn't leave me out, did you?

KROTT. Paint a shipwreck without a ship?

MANDOLINO (*who has been ferreting among his books*). Look. (*He gives Vittoria a volume*)

VITTORIA (*reading the title*). "American Drama from Fitch to Krott," by Mortimer Zwiengelbein. I'm impressed.

MANDOLINO (*leafing through the book still in her hands*). Let me show you.

KROTT. Children, children! I'm crimson with bashful delight. (*He covers his face with a vast red handkerchief*) Go on, don't stop, I can't stand it.

VITTORIA. Isn't he a scream!

MANDOLINO. I've found it. (*He points to a passage*)

VITTORIA (*reads*). "The degradation, corruption and ultimately the collapse of the American dream is nowhere better exemplified than in the shorter plays of Delancey Krott, in which the festering sores of an overripe society are exhibited without pretty evasions."

KROTT. *Petty evasions.*

VITTORIA. Isn't it true though. This country is in terrible shape, isn't it?

KROTT (*removing his handkerchief*). Gruesome.

MANDOLINO. "They are not so much short plays as rotten leaves torn directly from a decaying tree."

KROTT. I wish I'd written that sentence.

MANDOLINO. I don't want you to be too amazed when you see the play, Miss Grazzi. I haven't read it yet, but—Hey, you won't see the play! (*He beams*) You'll be in Italy during the whole run—and by the way, I've got all the material I promised to bring you. Why don't we look it over now? Delancey, sit in a corner and polish your ego.

KROTT. Witling! I want to see to what pestilential holes you're driving your lovely *studentessa*.

VITTORIA. I'm afraid I'm not going to Italy.

MANDOLINO and KROTT. Why not?

MANDOLINO. What happened?

VITTORIA. Something happened the day before yesterday. I tried to call you but I couldn't reach you. And then I thought, by this time he's certainly gone to all the trouble already, so I might as well keep the appointment—especially since Frank may be able to use the material.

MANDOLINO. Who is Frank?

VITTORIA. My next-older brother.

KROTT. Aha!

MANDOLINO. Of course your brother is welcome to everything here, but do you care to tell us what happened, or is it a family secret?

VITTORIA. Oh, I don't suppose it's a secret. But it'll sound awfully silly to sophisticated people like you and especially Mr. Krott.

KROTT. I'll leave the room at once—after hearing the story. Out with it.

VITTORIA. Well, I was looking for a plain box for my jewelry—I haven't got much, but I'd hate to have it stolen—so I was rummaging in our closets, when I saw exactly what I needed. I opened the box and lo and behold it was full of letters.

KROTT. Sinister.

VITTORIA. Love letters.

KROTT. Impossible!

VITTORIA. Love letters between Frank—my brother — and a girl by the name of Luisa Rosso. And now I'd better explain who Luisa Rosso is.

KROTT. I should hope so!

VITTORIA. She's the closest friend of one of my cousins in Acquaviva. We've all been corresponding ever since we were kids—although we've never seen each other—and even some of the neighbors and relatives of relatives have gotten into the game. We write in English and they answer in Italian. It was always a lot of fun. And then we exchanged photographs.

KNOTT. Franco saw Luisa, Luisa saw Franco, a secret correspondence began, and, as we all show to advantage in the haze of distance and foreign languages, the two children inevitably fell in love.

VITTORIA. Frank is twenty-two.

MANDOLINO. What happened after you found the letters?

VITTORIA. I gave Frank an awful scolding. "Why didn't you tell me about this?" I said. "Am I some kind of stranger; are you ashamed before your own sister? *You're* the one who's going to Italy now." The poor boy hadn't opened his mouth when the family chose me because he knew how badly I longed to go. But I went to work fast. Day before yesterday I called the two families together again—we've got our own funny way of calling family meetings—and there I made a long speech about love, and then we all decided that Frank was the one who must be our emissary.

MANDOLINO. After making all your wonderful plans!

VITTORIA. A girl shouldn't be selfish.

KROTT. A splendid Jamesian comment! If I hadn't all but completed my script, I might have taken a cue from your last words to reprogram my brain. The girl who seeks a desperate escape from "America" in quotation marks and all that it represents, and who lives for her one journey to Europe—freedom, civilization, the arts. At the last moment she sacrifices it all to a brother, a worthless brother—

VITTORIA. Frank is—

KROTT. The ethical claim asserts itself over the hedonic life—duty triumphs over pleasure—and the girl experiences a victory of sorts, but oh, what a price she pays! A life of drab sameness and joyless confinement.

VITTORIA (*cheerfully*). Well, I certainly don't want anything drab to happen to *me*. So I've decided to take a summer job and maybe even work a few evenings a week during the next academic year. My dad promised that if I keep up my grades he'll give me a job himself. I've already got my travel outfits. So it'll only be a year—I won't be an old woman yet!

KROTT. Hopeless!

VITTORIA. Not me! I'm always optimistic.

MANDOLINO. Here, Miss Grazzi, take these to your brother, he can keep them all summer.

VITTORIA. Thank you so much, Dr. Mandolino. Frank is very neat, so I'm sure they'll all be as good as new when you get them back.

MANDOLINO. Let me know when the wedding is!

VITTORIA. Let you know? You're both invited!

MANDOLINO (*standing up*). Till September then, and I expect a full report. I suppose I'll see you in Italian Six.

VITTORIA. Wouldn't miss it for anything. (*To Delancey*) Will you still send me those tickets, in spite of my not going to Italy?

KROTT. Of course! And be sure to bring the family.

VITTORIA. 26 Flower Street, Brooklyn 11211.

KROTT (*writing it down*). Done. Let me know what you think of the play.

VITTORIA. Oh, I will! Thank you so much. Well, I guess I'll say good-bye now.

MANDOLINO and KROTT. Good-bye! Have a nice summer. (*Delancey opens the door for her and she leaves*)

MANDOLINO. Well well well well.

KROTT. Well well well well what?

MANDOLINO. Really a sweet girl. And a wonderful family, obviously.

KROTT. Are you about to suggest that I throw perfume into that bottle of pumped water?

MANDOLINO. Why not? Reality. Now don't get mad at me again. Let's have lunch, I'm starved.

KROTT. You're treating me for a change?

MANDOLINO. I'm treating you for a change. Let me get my things together. (*He gathers papers and books*) Reality, when you come down to it—

KROTT. Reality, you dangling participle, reality is the dung under the ding dong bell. Do you hear the bells of the world tolling? Ding dong dung. No you don't hear the bells of the world tolling. You've got your Vittoria, your Italian pump, your sweet secret in Frankie's bosom. The real Vittoria and Frankie that I am trying to make you see, the slime under these buttercups, you don't want to see. But I, and every honest artist with me, shall pull their smiles wide open and show you down those sickening gullets the corridors to death.

MANDOLINO. All right, all right, but after lunch, Delancey?

KROTT. Tragic muse, poison his apple pie!

THE END

## AN AFTERWORD WITH A TINGE OF MANIFESTO

Vittoria Grazzi's tale as seen by Vittoria herself comes to me as a true story my wife told me at the dinner-table one day concerning a student of hers. Impressed by this piece of the rawest reality, I began to wonder whether a writer boasting of an irreproachable record of publication by the most esoteric quarterlies and the obscurest presses, and productions in the least commercial of all possible theaters—whether, in short, an immaculately *serious* writer of our times could flaunt such a kind, happy, simple and normal character in a fiction without instant expulsion from the brotherhood of Intellectuals.

Let me explain. Victorian England and Fillmore America sentimentalized sanity, happiness, and goodness almost to death. Their grand cultural reluctance, we all know, was bare sex. We, instead, have bared sex almost to death, recording a thousand times over—in our elite stories, poems, novels, plays and films—every imaginable performer, partnership and position. Our grand cultural blushes (to complete the symmetry) are aroused by goodness, sanity, and happiness. Only “commercial hacks,” only confectioners of lollipops for the Moral Majority, come forward to affirm that not all men, women and children are either globs of shapeless jelly or pestiferous predators. Hearing this, and hearing it from such quarters, highbrows give each other the wink, and sneer.

There is a touch of exaggeration in what I say—but only a touch. And I feel free to ask, in the next place, like Dr. Mandolino, What about Reality? We have sufficient evidence that sex *was* practiced in the nineteenth century, and that people did not procreate by means of an exchange of fine English words. And we are quick to chide the very best Victorian writers for lowering their eyes before this vast sector of Reality. But by the same token, there *is* sanity, goodness and happiness abroad in our times. They too continue to occupy a vast sector of Reality. Let us leave our “commercial hacks” to one side, and severely quiz our serious writers: Where, ladies and gentlemen, is *your* honesty? Are you not the self-same cowards and



hypocrites as Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens, and Henry James? You are; and arbitrary convention trammels you as tightly as it did your craven predecessors. You have not, contrary to your belief, broken free of convention; you have merely enslaved yourselves to a new one.

As soon as the serious writer gives his assent to the proposition that even in our century of gas chambers and hydrogen bombs the Vittoria Grazzi qualities survive, he ought to claim for his art (be it realistic or dada) the same right of access to this lovely material which he enjoys—all too freely—with respect to rapine, fraud, rape and murder; to neurosis and psychosis; to cancer, sexual enormities, AIDS, emasculation and amputation. It *must* be possible to reconcile high Art with a subject even as recalcitrant as human goodness. It is intolerable that *any* sector of Reality be excluded from the best literature.

Though fired by this conviction, I had still to face the problem of how to “imitate” kindness, simplicity of heart, and innocent sanity without dishonoring myself. I came up at last with the hoary trick of the wooden horse concealing the Greeks. I gave myself the proper credentials: invented Krott (the reader whose French has weakened is invited to look up the word *crotte* in his dictionary), wrote an “experimental” comedy, provided sexual antics, injected a dose of psychobiographical cant—everything suitably nasty—and so, flashing my best off-off-Broadway grin, smuggled in my Vittoria.

This solution yielded a secondary benefit, namely the chance to tackle and tickle a few of those “avant-garde” inventions that have been avantgarding in our theaters for almost a century. But the celebration of goodness remains the point of all my points. Just as once upon a time perspective became too easy for painters, today nastiness has become too easy for writers, whether they be poets, novelists, or playwrights. And by now writers ought to be ashamed to truckle to this literary convention. I, at any rate, am as weary of it—in Beckett, Pinter, Genet, Arrabal, Albee, Shepard, Orton, Bond and numberless others—as I am sick of nasty box-architecture, nasty gashes on canvas, nasty gnarls of metal sitting on lawn or concrete, and nasty atonal or electronic noises. Creators of the world, move on. Enough is enough.

AND THE LORD GOD PLANTED  
A GARDEN

## CHARACTERS

GOD

GABRIEL

ADAM

EVE

*The scene: The plot of cleared land where Adam and Eve dwell, with the entrance to their cave.*

## PRODUCTION NOTES

Adam and Eve should be played by short actors, God and Gabriel by tall ones. This will give the right sense of scale.

There should be nothing childish about Adam and Eve, even when they are playing games. On the other hand, there must be nothing erotic in the game they play in Scene Two.

God and Gabriel are magnificently clad, but without indication of sex, and always comport themselves with perfect dignity. Even when displeased or angry they remain composed and speak in measured tones.

Adam and Eve wear skins.

God must have a beautiful speaking voice, and Gabriel must sing beautifully.

SCENE ONE

GOD. Eve and Adam!

EVE and ADAM. My Lord.

GOD. Eve for you whom I created first of human creatures  
Mother of all the wise family male and female to come  
Until the day  
Yet may it never befall  
When I abolish you;  
Then Adam for you  
Sprung from Eve's belly womb and hollow  
Both of you my children made in my image  
Image too of Gabriel  
Image of all the angels unknown to you but wandering and  
dwelling  
All but numberless in the universe my home;  
For you delightful to me  
My darlings my special care my fond experiments  
For you female and male  
For you above my animals  
I made this Garden  
An island for you  
Fairest of all provinces of Earth  
The rest sour waters wild flames harsh noises  
Cloud-smothered mountains and stony soil:  
Untamed compounds of discordant elements  
To be by you and yours, mankind,  
In all their multitude understood and tamed:  
Such is the inner meaning  
Eve and Adam  
Of the gift of your being in the image of God.

Tell me then: what are your tasks on earth?

GABRIEL. Speak woman my child.

EVE. To understand and tame.

GABRIEL. To understand and tame what? Adam my child reply.

ADAM. This Garden and the Earth. The Earth, my Lord?

GOD. It is the vast round

Of which your Garden Adam is a morsel.

It begins beyond the river

Embracing this fair island

With its twinned and twining arms

And continues in unmeasured tracts of land

Weeks away months years of walking running or riding

Huge waters too shaking their dangerous waves

Yet not so dangerous but these too

Even the high waves you shall one day

Understand and tame.

But here in your beginning my dears

This Garden where the lily grows

The rose the bluebell yes flowers and trees

All but innumerable

Fruit of the branch the twig the root

A river affable and beasts your friends and willing food

Above you mild sun mild clouds the rain a pleasing visitor

All this I made for your beginning

And does it please you Adam please you Eve

Shall I do yet more for you?

Wake yourselves questioning me

For wisdom begins in shrewd questions.

(ADAM and EVE kneel)

ADAM. Wonder of beauty.

EVE. Splendor of power.

ADAM. Spring of cheer.

EVE. Marvel of abundance.

ADAM. We thank you.

EVE. And would like to bear you a gift of love.

GOD. Your gift oh my children is your best will

Seeking the utmost inward of things

In order to become their gods.

Yet ask. What more shall I provide?

ADAM. We need and desire nothing more my Lord.

GOD. Rise rise and sit with me.

Tell me what is here as yet obscure.

GABRIEL. Speak children do not fear.

EVE. The knife you gave us Gabriel and taught us how to make and use, and other tools for which we thank you:

ADAM. This knife cuts into a fig an orange;

EVE. And all is well.

ADAM. But when it stabs a calf a lamb a rabbit,

EVE. They cry as we do when by mischance it cuts our finger.

ADAM. They cry they struggle they shun their hated death.

EVE. And we do against them what none do against us.

ADAM. Hence we ask: is it right to harm and kill what is so terribly unlike the orange and fig?

GOD. It is right

For though you are like them you are also unlike them.

I have granted them suffering without sense of it

As I have granted them reasonable action

Without reasoning thought.

To you I have given pain

But also sense of it and reasonable action

But also reasoning thought.

Yet taking as I give

For I would not be spendthrift for the lion and miser for the eagle

I have left you naked saying to myself

Your thought shall provide

And has indeed provided leaves skins food

And this I answer this is just.

I commend your question and listen again.

EVE. Shall I who bore Adam bear all others male and female too,  
or shall he bear some and I others?

GOD. You shall bear all

And in the time of your heaviness

He shall provide for you.

To this purpose he received his swiftness and his power.

Ask again.

ADAM. The double river that enfolds us.

GABRIEL. How is it called Adam?

ADAM. I have forgotten.

GABRIEL. Eve how is it called?

EVE. I too have forgotten.

GABRIEL. We called it Hiddekel.

ADAM. So we did friend Gabriel it comes back to me.

GOD. What of the river child?

ADAM. Beyond it we can see trees bearing all manner of fruit—  
pears, cherries—

EVE. Peaches plums—

ADAM. Ever so rich! Today walking in our garden we asked each  
other seeing that we were falling short here and needed to wan-  
der farther and farther "Have we leave to cross the river and  
pluck the fruit beyond?" But we are afraid of the high water  
that seems to run and bite. Does the river signify **THUS FAR  
AND NO FARTHER?** Is it forbidden to cross it?

GOD. It is not forbidden my children but perilous.

I have made you in my image

But not of my inapprehensible substance.

You are male and female I am not.

Beware of death by falling death by striking

And concerning the river Hiddekel

Death by drowning.

I am your creator and lover but not your guardian.

Yet the angel Gabriel will teach you

How you may cross the river and be safe.  
All fruit of this earth you Eve and Adam may pluck and eat  
Save one  
Of one fruit only you may not taste  
One prohibition and no other  
I set athwart your lives.  
Turn your eyes where Gabriel is pointing  
Rise and tell me what you see.

EVE. On that nameless tree.

ADAM. Fruitless till now.

GABRIEL. Apples now hang.

GOD. And those you shall not eat.

Adam and Eve you shall not eat this fruit.

It is forbidden.

Shun it. Such is my command.

ADAM. We will shun it, oh Lord of creation.

GOD. Should you not ask me why?

EVE. We forgot.

GOD. This fruit Eve and Adam

Does not differ from others.

It is neither sublime above them nor poisonous.

It is forbidden in order to be forbidden.

It is the sign the token of Majesty above you.

Thought is but thought.

This token is seen touched smelled and can be tasted.

So is obedience made visible and palpable to you.

All else is love and gift permission and delight.

ADAM. My Lord, we shall obey you.

EVE. And our angel Gabriel and all good counsels and commands.

GOD. Return to your daily simple chores—

Eat dance love sleep laugh

For this is your beginning

And the mere dear syllables you are now

Shall become words when I return



Then sentences then volumes as I return and yet return  
Hoping to remain father and mother to you  
Upon the track of time to which I foreordain no end.

(ADAM and EVE *withdraw*)

GOD. Will the end be happy heaven-born Gabriel?  
Tell me your thought.

(GABRIEL *smiles*)

GOD. No Gabriel I do not see your thoughts!  
Smiling again? Mocking my question?

GABRIEL. You saw the thought for which you blamed me.

GOD. Because the angels have made it familiar!

Oh misbelievers! No Gabriel again and again  
I tell you all I do not dive into your thoughts.  
Commanding Spirit I am.

My powers immense my knowledge wide-arched  
And so I was in the beginning when out of force  
Force and light light and time time and void  
I sprang

And you millions around me  
And yet why whence and whereto I do not know  
Nor think I ever will.

In loving anguish and helpless longing  
I sense I guess a commanding spirit commanding mine  
Begun before my beginning and it perhaps commanded again  
Mysterious sphere into sphere until  
Centered and sealed there crouches perhaps  
Some compression of power beyond conception and worship.  
But let it go!

I am too busy to be haunted!  
I journey to and fro from sky to sky  
Planting inventions exuberant  
Furnishing each globe with the enterprises  
Of my unappeasable joy.

Yet athwart each invention advances  
A resistance hard or mild—  
Matter's obduracy to matter yet also to my spirit  
Another spirit opposing me  
And now it yields and now I bend.  
Such are the angels' thoughts and even theirs

*(He points toward ADAM and EVE)*

Which mine surround and often catch  
Yet sometimes miss as chattering swallows do  
That snap at insects in the darkening day.  
How then Gabriel I asked  
Shall it be with these in our image so beautiful?

GABRIEL. Beautiful image stuffed my Lord—

GOD. With messes of male and female fat and bone  
And nerve and bile how else my dear how else  
Was I to animate that image?

I am given no power to make another God or angel.  
Then how shall my image live?

Dead images we see when we hover over lakes  
You and I preening in such mirrors.  
These new images I desired

Knowing feeling growing adoring and inquisitive  
For albeit I have made many things that grow  
None yet have I created essential of myself.

Think of it Gabriel: knowledge and its delight  
So far granted only to us will spangle this earth  
Like a glisten of infinite dew on its foliage.

And if on this earth why not again and again elsewhere  
Among these generous galaxies our home?

And at last why not the stones the clouds  
Why not the dust the fire the water

All of it mindful all of it intelligence  
And every atom conversable with each  
In mutual infinite lucidity?

GABRIEL. Therefore may all be well with them.

GOD. Smiling again?

You believe that I know.

But I speak like a hammer and tell you I do not know.

Kneel Gabriel and believe.

GABRIEL. I do God my only God.

GOD. Make them begin to learn

As I soar and land among other beginning worlds.

(GOD *kisses* GABRIEL *and leaves*)

## SCENE TWO

*(Eve is sharpening her stone knife against another and singing a two-note working song.)*

EVE. Pah-pah-pah-pah

Sharp-sharp-sharp-sharp

AND

Pah-pah-pah-pah

Sharp-sharp-sharp-BLUNT!

*(She laughs uproariously)*

ADAM *(offstage)*. What are you laughing at?

EVE *(baffled)*. I don't know. Is the meat hot?

ADAM. Hot hot hot.

EVE. And the fruit cold. *(She giggles, still puzzling things out)*

Tak-tak-tak-tak

Sharp-sharp!

*(ADAM enters with roasted meat and a heap of melons)*

EVE. Good! Let me try. *(She takes her sharpened flint and whacks a melon open)* You see? Me first!

ADAM. That's fair. Your knife. You first.

EVE *(tenderly)*. But then you. Here's a fat slice.

ADAM. Thank you. Very nice. You're as nice as a melon, Eve. Let's play a little before eating the meat.

EVE. Before? Not after?

ADAM. Before, because after, we're full, we're tired, we'd rather sleep.

EVE. But before, we're hungry, and the meat is nicely hot.

ADAM. By God, you're right, Eve.

EVE. Yes, but Adam you're right too.

ADAM. That's right! I'm right too, you're right and I'm right! *(They laugh uproariously)*

EVE. You're so funny! Let's play before. Come on, help me get up.

ADAM. Ready?

EVE. Ready. But remember the new rule.

ADAM. Wait. What is it again? I know. No hands above the other's knees.

EVE. That's it. Here we go!

*(They play a game. The aim is to catch the other's foot, ankle or shin and flip him or her over)*

ADAM. I'll get you first!

EVE. No you won't but yes I will!

ADAM. Yes I will but no you won't!

EVE. Mouse!

ADAM. Mosquito!

*(They squeal, laugh, struggle and growl ad libitum; finally EVE flips ADAM over)*

ADAM. Aaaaw!

EVE. I win!

*(She dances around him and sings her two-note song)*

EVE. Win-win-win-win!

*(Adam catches her and she falls too)*

EVE. Aaw! Unfair! Unfair!

ADAM. Everybody loses, everybody wins!

*(They laugh uproariously and roll on the ground)*

EVE. Oh I liked that! My belly aches from laughing.

ADAM. But now we're too dirty to eat. Let's go wash in the river.

EVE. I don't know. There's almost no water in it this time of year.

ADAM. Almost no water is plenty. We're not *that* dirty, silly!

*(They laugh)*

EVE. I was joking, silly! Me first!

*(She runs off)*

ADAM. Everybody first!

(*He follows her*)

(GABRIEL appears on the empty stage; ADAM and EVE's laughter recedes)

GABRIEL. My loved ones. (*He examines the meat*) They have forgotten that once upon a time they knew nothing of fire and cooking. (*He examines the tools*) Not so bad. Slow by slow things almost incredible come to pass, yet oh my Sovereign—

EVE (*offstage*) Clean to dinner!

ADAM (*singing the two-note tune*) Din-din-din-din!

GABRIEL. How many years shall they like that same raw song?

(*Enter ADAM and EVE*)

ADAM. Our angel!

(*They kneel*)

GABRIEL. Greetings again. Rise my dears.

(*They rise and he kisses each on the eyes*)

ADAM. Always your lips like ours as if we were the same you perfect Majesty and mere she and I.

GABRIEL. I appear the same for your sakes though in your absence neither male nor female but like our God presented male to your infant imaginations.

EVE. Where have you travelled these many days dear angel?

GABRIEL. These how many days dear Eve?

EVE. These—these (*she looks at ADAM*).

ADAM. Twenty?

EVE. Twenty thousand?

ADAM. Many.

EVE. We have forgotten to place the little nicks on the branch every morning as you said.

GABRIEL. Will you do so from now on?

ADAM. We will.

EVE. If you tell us where you went and what you did!

GABRIEL. I sought out the fair and rough the wet and dry of this earth my domain and trust foreseeing that the Commanding Spirit (praise it forever and ever) will make it a garden like yours for your descendants to delight in. Now sit down my children and eat.

(ADAM and EVE begin to eat. EVE tentatively offers GABRIEL some meat)

GABRIEL (*shaking his head*). You are made in our image but only our image and more I may not tell you. But across the river—what is the river's name?

BOTH. Hiddekel!

GABRIEL. Across the river I saw the trees without their fruit. Have you plucked those trees bare in my absence? Have you savored all their fruit? Are the cherries there as delicious to the tongue and palate as they are here?

EVE. You are teasing us Gabriel.

GABRIEL. How so?

ADAM. When the trees were copious with all that tempting fruit the river ran high and swift and we could not cross to reach them. Now that the river is low the trees have long since dropped their fruit and I guess the animals have eaten it.

GABRIEL. Now that the river is low you should build a bridge of tree trunks across it you and Eve working hard together hard and many a day devising height thickness and strength against the current once it grows strong again.

ADAM. What is a bridge Gabriel?

GABRIEL. I will show you. (*He draws in the sand with a stick*) Imagine a bird looking at you two. Here you are—Adam and Eve—two dots.

ADAM. Two dots? I and she?

EVE. Silly! The two dots is supposing. Supposing says Gabriel supposing this is I and you.

GABRIEL. Do you understand?

ADAM. Of course!

GABRIEL. And here is the river.

ADAM. And the water?

GABRIEL. We will keep the water safe in our minds.

EVE. That's easy since the river's almost dry! (*They laugh*)

GABRIEL. Hush children listen to me and look. Now I draw a line across the river and if these dots were you and you why should not that line be the trunk of a tree that fell down?

ADAM. Lightning struck it!

GABRIEL. Yes. Or else you cut it down with your good stone axe. And now you are walking over it careful not to fall. Remember we are imagining the river is full. You are walking across it and now you reach the wonderful land on the other side. Why do you look puzzled?

EVE. How did the tree fall so courteously just where you wanted it?

ADAM. And when the river is full Gabriel won't the water cover it or carry it away or I don't know what?

GABRIEL. Your questions please me. Eve it did not fall out of kindness towards you for our Sovereign does not so dispose the world. You and Adam pulled it in place from the forest.

ADAM. From the forest? Thank you! Not I!

EVE. Nor I! Thank you!

GABRIEL. How spoiled you are darlings of sunshine and gobblers of perpetual feasts!

ADAM. Dear angel do not be angry with us. We will cut the tree and pull the bridge in place.

GABRIEL. Nevertheless you were right Adam saying the water would cover it and roll it away when you needed it most. How then shall we keep this from happening?

EVE. I am sleepy Gabriel. God will help.

ADAM. Spoiled! You're spoiled! And I am wide awake. We have to raise the tree trunk high above the water.

GABRIEL. But how?

EVE. And besides a tree trunk is too short. We shall need two at least. The river is wide.

ADAM. Do we really want the fruit on that other side Gabriel? We have enough here. This is a game you're playing with us.



EVE. I do. I want it. And I know what to do.

GABRIEL. Tell us.

EVE. The river is full of flat stones.

GABRIEL. Good!

ADAM. I know! We pile—

EVE. I thought of it first! We pile the stones up in the middle of the river—

ADAM. Because it's dry! You forgot to say that! And we roll the trees—. Oh but they're going to be so heavy and make such a sweat on our bodies. . . .

GABRIEL. To be sure Adam. Two or three tree trunks. And who knows? Two or three piles of stones.

EVE. That's what *I* thought.

ADAM (*glum*). So be it.

GABRIEL. But how will you keep the trunks from rolling off the stones? And how will you keep yourselves from falling into the water?

EVE. Slowly Gabriel slowly.

ADAM. Ask us again one question at a time.

GABRIEL. How will you keep the trunks from rolling off the flat stones?

ADAM. I don't know.

GABRIEL. Think. Eve?

EVE. Thinking takes time Gabriel and alone is best.

GABRIEL. All the same think of the round trunk and the flat stone. The trunk rolls. Do you see it in your minds? You don't want it to roll. You want it to stay where it is. You have means. You have tools. What can you do?

ADAM. Slice a flat place on the trunk?

GABRIEL. Very good! Do you see it Eve?

EVE. Yes I do and I could have thought of it too. Flat on flat will be steady. We'll do it Gabriel. You will praise us then you see how seriously we work.

GABRIEL. I hope I shall. But next. How will you walk on that bridge without falling off and the torrent of water swift under you?

EVE. I don't know.

ADAM. I do. Make the trunk flat again but this time on top all the way, like this.

GABRIEL. To be sure. But still that will be dangerous. Think how narrow the bridge will be! What if a safer way could be devised?

*(He shows ADAM and EVE a couple of creepers)*

EVE. We tie a lot of creepers together! You showed us how knots are made. I haven't forgotten. Look. Strong, isn't it?

ADAM. Then what?

EVE. We tie one end to a strong bush—or else around a rock—on one bank, and the other end on the other. The first time over we shall need to be very very careful.

ADAM. Wait. We gouge deep holes into our bridge and we put sticks upright into the holes. Then we tie the creepers to the sticks. Do you see what I mean Eve? We'll walk across and hold on the way monkeys do with their paws and tails. Get up—let me show you—give me your hand—this way—this way.

EVE. Don't fall off! *(They laugh)* And what else Gabriel? Give us more hard questions. Wait! We shall make the holes *before* we lay the trunks on the stones!

GABRIEL. And how high will you pile the stones?

ADAM. Higher than the water.

GABRIEL. But how high is the water?

ADAM. High Gabriel.

EVE. Stupid! That's not an answer!

GABRIEL. Doesn't the river leave its message somewhere?

ADAM. Its message? What do you mean?

GABRIEL. I will show you. Look at the far bank from here. Do you see a light part above and a darker part below?

EVE. Yes I do.

ADAM. So do I.

GABRIEL. This is the message the river leaves. Where the dark ends and the light begins is as high—

EVE. Gabriel! What are those animals? Look look!

ADAM. Three five six of them. Staring at us! How fine they are!

GABRIEL. They are horses.

EVE. Horses.

ADAM. Horses.

GABRIEL. Pleased with you pleased with your zeal our Lord has brought you his next gift.

EVE and ADAM. Our Lord be praised!

EVE. Now they're running and playing, all six of them.

GABRIEL. Six Adam and Eve? Count again.

*(They do so, pointing with their fingers and numbering. They have a little trouble and interfere with each other ad libitum)*

ADAM. Six, seven eight! Eight horses!

EVE *(at the same time)* Eight horses! Now we have it right!

GABRIEL. You shall befriend them you man and woman.

ADAM. They are leaving. May we cross the dry bed and follow them?

GABRIEL. Not now. I have summoned them in order to tempt you and encourage you. They will come again my beloved but only when the river is full and the trees are spangled again with delectable fruit. Then will you cross and the horses lovingly greeted shall be serviceable to you.

ADAM. How? Shall we eat them? Do they give milk?

GABRIEL. No. But they will allow you to ride them.

EVE. Ride them?

GABRIEL. As you have seen the little gibbon riding on his mother.

EVE. How strange!

GABRIEL. Sitting astride them you will gallop and travel and discover and make new homes in other lands you and your progeny ages to come.

ADAM. Gallop . . .

EVE. Blessed be the Father and Mother who gives us these treasures

. . .

ADAM. Now and in ages to come.

*(They kneel)*

GABRIEL. But you will not forget the bridge?

ADAM. No Gabriel.

GABRIEL. You will measure haul cut drill and fasten?

EVE. We will we promise dear angel.

GABRIEL. So be it. Our Lord is watching. Answer his love with yours and deserve oh deserve his care.

## SCENE THREE

*(Night. The remains of a fire are smoldering. By the fire, a log bench is propped on two stones. GOD and GABRIEL stand to one side.)*

GABRIEL. I saw Adam run to the riverbank with a straight stick and measure all by himself untold and unguided the height he needed ascertaining it by the watermark left on each bank.

GOD. And then?

GABRIEL. Then came a little piling of stones and a little hacking at a tree and then they forgot.

GOD. Forgot!

GABRIEL. They made themselves a bench however. See how they flattened both ends of the trunk so it would sit securely on the stones.

GOD. And in the middle two scooped-out places for the joy of their delicate little buttocks!

GABRIEL. In which delight all else was forgotten and the luxurious fruit on the other bank not seen no longer craved.

GOD. Where are they now?

GABRIEL. Within doing the merry act of love. Will you be granting them offsprings soon my Sovereign? When shall the race of man begin?

GOD. Not yet. Must it begin? I have cancelled other beginnings friend Gabriel. Now however I shall leave their minds undiverted by mother-care and father-worry.

GABRIEL. With deference I ask: have you allowed them from your store mind enough to be and perform what you propose?

GOD. If not I will abolish them and begin again. Here they come hand in hand and in the flattering moonlight a handsome couple I would grieve to call a mistake though less beautiful than horse elion and nightingale.

EVE. Dearest and best. Sweet and violent. My restless fountain.

ADAM. My blessed chalice. Best and dearest. Violent and sweet.

EVE. The moon has kept its eye wide open for us.

ADAM. And whenever it does there is a bird that flutes its best unseen in its own warm foliage. Listen.

*(They sit on the bench)*

GOD. Yes I would grieve. . . . Gabriel who knows? That dull bridge! Bridge to what? More mere feeding! Perhaps some loftier task of the mind will animate them.

EVE. *(Singing the two-note tune)*

Love-love-love-love.

ADAM. There's milk left in the shell and a bit of fire. Shall I warm it?

EVE. Do my pretty do, while I crack hazelnuts. Hard work has made us hungry.

*(They laugh while EVE cracks nuts with a stone)*

EVE. Me one you one.

*(GOD and GABRIEL reveal themselves)*

GOD. Eve first created

And Adam the strong: greetings again.

ADAM and EVE. Lord God, welcome and all blessings upon you!

*(They kneel)*

GOD. Rise my children.

I remember your house I remember your fire

But I do not recall this strong bench.

Well done! Well done my firstling architects!

GABRIEL. Tell your Sovereign nevertheless

Tell honestly what this bench was meant to be

Namely not for repose but crossing over.

EVE. As you said Gabriel.

ADAM. It wanted to be a—bridge.

EVE. We are ashamed but it couldn't be.

GOD. Why not?

ADAM. We ran to the forest

EVE. And we ran to the river

ADAM. We found a log

EVE. We piled the stones

ADAM. We rolled it here

EVE. We cut and levelled the ends

ADAM. And then the silly rains began to fall again

EVE. The river swelled

ADAM. The stones disappeared

EVE. The log was too short

ADAM. We made a bench of it

EVE. And we are happy my Lord happy enough without those other  
plums and pears and without unfamiliar regions.

GOD. Didn't you know the rain would fall again?

ADAM. We did know. But why did it fall before we had finished  
Gabriel's bridge?

GOD. Every ninth month it falls Eve and Adam

And falls for three months quenching and drenching

The beautiful world: and you

You must do your work quick or slow accordingly.

Where tell me is your notched tree branch

Upon which you tell the days

According to the sun

And months according to the moon?

*(Silence)*

GABRIEL. They lost it my Lord.

GOD. How many days my children does it take

The full moon to be full a second time?

ADAM. Many . . .

EVE. Not so many . . .

GOD. How many days my children does it take

To haul a felled tree to the river?

ADAM. I forget . . .

EVE. I don't know . . .

GOD. How many days my children does it take

To set one pile of stones athwart the river?

EVE. Two?

ADAM. Twenty?

GOD. How many days my children does it take  
Until the river falls again and turns to sand?

(ADAM and EVE look puzzled)

GOD. And when you have reckoned my children  
How long you need to haul the logs to bevel them  
To pile the stones to place the trunks  
To stretch the guiding handrail  
When you have added each to each and each  
Of all these things then tell me children  
When will you need to begin the work  
That will take you in triumph to the golden fruit  
The horses the new so promising regions  
When the river is too dangerous to swim?

EVE. Mighty Creator of all we have, have we offended you?

ADAM. That you make it all so hard?

EVE. So full of dancing numbers?

ADAM. That dance us dizzy?

GOD. But it is a happy dance they dance  
And would you not like to know the steps?  
That dance of the numbers is the heartbeat of your universe  
And when you know the steps  
The steps that I and Gabriel dearly wish to teach you  
You two shall become little less than gods  
Who now are little more than apes.

ADAM. What must we do my Sovereign?

GOD. Begin again and having begun  
Let your hunger demand more and yet more  
And always between rest and play be restlessly exacting  
Of this so queriable world.  
Take this humble unwanted stick  
And with your knife mark it thus  
Signifying the moon is full.



(EVE *does so*)

GOD. Tomorrow this same time

The moon still puffing its round cheek

You shall mark the stick again

Yet slightly short signifying

The moon begins to wane in its monthly journey.

ADAM. Sometimes the moon shows half its face sometimes it disappears even when the sky is clear and sometimes or always I don't know it grows slowly—

EVE. Wait! It goes and comes by its number my Lord by its very own number!

GOD. And these numbers you shall mark

And when the moon is gone the mark will be thus

And when it is full again you shall count up the marks

And mark them all together thus: one month.

And month by month or day by day

You shall measure the river the work you do

The growth of your children when they come

And thereafter you shall learn steps

Yet more intricate dances more delightful

Adding multiplying dividing

Taking distance thickness height rapidity

Once you begin my children and adore

The dance of thought outward and outward unto me.

ADAM. Tell us and teach us my Lord.

GOD. Here is a straight rod. Let it be called a span.

Here mark it with a notch. That is half a span.

Span the distance between your shelter and the forest

Then between your shelter and the riverbank

Then span upward your height and then the trees'.

Mark the number by your two hands

Which have five fingers each.

Record and remember.

Tell each measure of time each measure of distance

Over and over till you can no longer forget.  
Look at the moon again my dears  
Think how it walks from horizon to horizon.  
After you have marked it full half full  
And of that half another half then filling once again  
You shall ask of it does it walk in the sky alone?

EVE. No so do the stars.

GOD. And now I tell you this:

The sun too is a star.

EVE. Like these?

ADAM. And yet so different?

GOD. Different because nearer to us

Think how this fire of yours diminishes  
Seen from that hill many spans from here.

ADAM. And the sun too walks from side to side because it is a star!

GOD. And yet my children it is not the sun

That walks but the earth turning upon itself  
And as it turns you who stand upon it  
Think it is the sun that moves but it is you  
It is the earth on which you stand that moves  
And moves by number hour by hour and they too  
The hours will be known to you by and by.

ADAM. Gabriel!

(GABRIEL takes his hand and EVE's)

GABRIEL. Do not fear. That motion is sweet and soft and man  
shall never feel it.

EVE. The sky seems terrible tonight.

GOD. Meet it bravely. Meet by and by

Galaxies immense whirlpools of stars  
Planets and meteors flights of great melted bodies  
Light spreading from star to star vast silences  
Lonely dust dense points that suck atoms and light  
Time that flames out and is born again  
Globes of power fists of matter outward outward

Constituting in my great arms the Anthem of Existence.

*(In the distance a choir of voices is softly singing)*

ADAM and EVE. What are they?

GABRIEL. Listen.

EVE. Heavenly angels. . . .

ADAM. Merciful heaven. . . .

GABRIEL. They are frightened.

GOD. They are crying.

*(After a while, the music recedes and dies out)*

GOD. Fall asleep Eve first created of human beings  
And Adam strong father. Of my words retain  
What is needed and let the rest be dreamed away  
But leaving in your minds a flavor of high longing.  
Have I created them sufficient Gabriel?

GABRIEL. Be merciful my Sovereign.

GOD. Farewell good angel.

Continue.

As always I will descend again.

## SCENE FOUR

*(ADAM is squatting in the sun, surrounded by several kinds of fruit, including apples. He sings the two-note song.)*

ADAM. Orange good melon good  
Good banana apple good  
good good good!

*(He cuts an apple in two and bites into a half. Suddenly perplexed, he stops. He takes another apple and also cuts it in two. He rises. Then he cuts a banana in two. He rises and fetches two long bones. He places the two bones before him on the ground, and then places the halves of apples and bananas alongside them. He falls into a deep study)*

EVE *(offstage)*. Adam! Adam! *(She rushes in)* I need to tell you!

ADAM. Stop! Catch you breath, silly!

EVE. No, I don't want to catch my breath. I have a story!

ADAM. You're sweating, dirty, bleeding from your shins—what happened?

EVE. A glorious story!

ADAM. Good!

EVE. I was standing on our lookout rock near the river when suddenly I saw those horses again, those beautiful horses, and yet the river's almost dry! Strange, I said to myself, and then I said, why not dare!

ADAM. Dare what?

EVE. Why not cross to the other side and meet them?

ADAM. Down one steep craggy bank and up the other to greet a flock of speechless beasts? Well, why not. But that's why you're bleeding, my woman.

EVE. I don't care. I decided to try. And I did clamber down holding on to branches and roots and tufts and striking against a few rocks, and then I waded across the river up to my knees and then up again—not so easy, I can tell you, but I was laughing all the while—never mind the scratches—because one of them—I mean the horses, one of the horses was standing at the edge looking down at me and sure it must have been wondering what I was about.

ADAM. Yes, animals do wonder. They didn't bite you, did they?

EVE. Bite me? They looked more like galloping away in a panic. And to be sure most of them did, going hunh hunh hunh as they ran. But three or four remained and especially the one who'd watched me climb up from the riverbed.

ADAM. Weren't you afraid?

EVE. A little. But afraid was less then excited. Wait. I've told you only the beginning so far. I went up to the horse slowly, I'll show you, this way easy easy easy and saying in my nice voice—

ADAM. The one I like so much—the one—you know—?

EVE. Of course not, silly! I have several nice voices and so have you. It was another one I used. Listen. Pretty pretty pretty I sing-sang. He never moved. When I reached him I began to pat him on the neck. At first he started and then I was truly scared. But I kept saying pretty pretty pretty and patting and then stroking his muzzle and I could tell he liked me.

ADAM. Liked you!

EVE. Yes! Liked me! What will you say when I tell you that I jumped on his back?

ADAM. As the angel said! Oh he knew it! He wanted it! What happened next?

EVE. He rode away with me. No! I rode away with him!

ADAM. God help you!

EVE. Rode away, Adam, holding on to his mane and neck, and I don't know how but such a wild adventure I never had riding far far and coming to that hill we always look at at sundown, and behind it I could see a vast beautiful plain, another river,

a row of mountains—was I dreaming? the wind whipping my cheeks, riding riding.

ADAM. And then what happened? Thank God you're back.

EVE. Because after a while he turned and brought me back where I had begun and there he stopped as if he meant it kindly.

ADAM. Strange and wonderful. And that was all?

EVE. All and enough. Down his back I climbed. Then down the bank across the bit of water and up the bank to come and tell you my story and take you with me for you to try.

ADAM. I will, but first let me show you something here.

EVE. What were you doing, Adam?

ADAM. I was sitting down to eat when—wait, I'll show you. (*He cuts another apple in two*) Have we got two apples now?

EVE. Of course not! What a fool. This is half and that is half.

ADAM. So you say. Now look at the bones. How many are there?

EVE. Two.

(*ADAM places the half apples parallel to the bones*)

ADAM. How is it we have two bones but not two apples?

EVE. I don't know. Who cares? Better give me my half and the banana too. I'm hungry. And then we'll gallop.

(*Both eat*)

ADAM. The horses, the halves. It's puzzling. Besides we keep eating these apples and—

EVE. And what?

ADAM. God said do not.

EVE. Years ago!

ADAM. Years?

EVE. Or months.

ADAM. I suppose so.

EVE. Let's go, Adam!

ADAM. As soon as I've wiped my mouth. Aren't you ever tired?

EVE. Never never!

(*She runs away laughing, followed by ADAM*)

ADAM. I'll be there first anyway! Adam the strong!

*(He vanishes. After a little while GABRIEL enters. He looks around, picks up the notched stick, and shakes his head)*

GABRIEL. After the quarter moon they gave up and forgot.

*(Offstage ADAM and EVE are heard singing to their tune)*

EVE. Bad horse gone horse fled horse

Thump thump thump.

ADAM. Wait horse stop horse

Thump thump thump.

GABRIEL. And they have heard the angels sing. . . .

*(Enter ADAM and EVE)*

ADAM. Our angel!

EVE. Gabriel!

GABRIEL. Well met once more. You look excited my children. And singing your one and best worst song as always.

EVE. I sat on a horse today and ran and flew with it and I wanted my Adam to do it too but they were all gone. Oh now I *am* tired and look—still bleeding at my shins.

GABRIEL. Have you forgotten the plant I showed you?

EVE. You showed us many plants dear angel.

GABRIEL. But now I mean the plant whose leaf can be placed—

EVE. On a wound to staunch the blood!

ADAM. I remember too!

GABRIEL. Where do you keep it? You were going to collect the plants that are good to eat in themselves those you could chop to season your meat those that heal wounds those that help the sick belly or the aching head and those to one side that are too sour or too bitter for any good. *(ADAM and EVE hang their heads)* Come let me heal your little wound. Do you remember what the blood does in your body Eve?

EVE. It . . . it bleeds.

ADAM. You wanted us to build a bridge Gabriel so we could reach and ride the horses on the other side yet you see they came in the dry season without any bridge at all.

GABRIEL. I asked them to come Adam.

*(Pause)*

ADAM. Why?

EVE. Yes why?

*(GABRIEL picks up the notched stick, and lets it fall again. He picks up the halves of apple)*

GABRIEL. This fruit the apple was forbidden my children.

ADAM. Look Gabriel. When you cut an apple in the middle you get half apples but you also get two pieces and how can half and two be the same?

GABRIEL. Because two can be two anything. Two human beings two trees two lions two angels but also two halves.

EVE. Two half angels?

GABRIEL. Yes if you cut me. And two half Eves and two half Adams.

*(ADAM and EVE laugh)*

GABRIEL. Laugh my dears laugh yet I am troubled for you. Fear our Sovereign's displeasure. He gives. But he can take away.

ADAM. You disliked . . . *(he looks at the apples)* our song.

GABRIEL. Would you not like to sing a better one?

ADAM. We would but what is wrong with ours? It has served us very properly.

EVE. And we sing it better all the time. We put new words to it.

GABRIEL. Yet a thousand other songs and nobler words are waiting for you to beget them. Have you forgotten the voices the wonderful voices?

EVE. When we fell asleep. How strange it was.

ADAM. Were they, were those *songs*?

GABRIEL. They were.

ADAM. But not for poor us.

GABRIEL. Why not try?

ADAM. I like trying! Show us.



GABRIEL. There are many notes. They go up but of course they come down too. It is like climbing up or down from one hill to another, and yet while you go up there may be little downs on the way and while you go down there may be little ups as you go. Listen! (*He sings*) And you can run your voices quickly or slowly, and sharply or smoothly. (*He sings, with extempore comments*) And finally you can go no higher or no lower. You are at the top of the hill or at the bottom of the valley. Let us do it together.

(*They sing scales with exclamations etc. extempore*)

GABRIEL. Stop now. Shall I make it a little more difficult?

EVE. Yes, do!

GABRIEL. Listen to me. (*He adds the minor key to his scale*) or else this. (*He varies his speed and rhythm*) But all these notes are like an immense but unkempt field full of flowers. You must cull the right flowers and arrange them properly. And these right flowers rightly arranged you shall call *melodies*, and to these melodies you shall fit words of your best choosing for your delight and consolation.

EVE. Make a melody for us Gabriel.

GABRIEL. Gladly. (*He sings*)

O Sovereign, how manifold are thy works! out of wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.

So is the great wide sea, wherein are things creeping and swimming innumerable, both small and great beasts.

O my Sovereign, thou art clothed in honor and majesty,  
Light is thy garment; thou spreadest the heavens like a curtain;

Thou makest the clouds thy horses and walkest upon the wings of the wind.

Thou didst lay the foundations of the earth; thou sendest the spring into the valley;

Thou givest drink to every beast of the field; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.

Thy trees are filled with sap, and the birds make their nests

therein;

The high hills are a refuge to the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies.

Thou didst appoint the moon for seasons and the sun for a daily measure.

And man goeth forth unto his soft labors until evening, culling fruit and shearing the lamb.

Therefore sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: converse unwearied of his munificence.

(ADAM and EVE are gaping)

ADAM. "Thou makest the clouds. . . ." How did it go again Gabriel?

GABRIEL. Thou makest the clouds thy horses and walkest upon the wings of the wind.

ADAM. The clouds are horses? The wind has wings?

EVE. Sing it again Gabriel.

(GABRIEL sings the line)

EVE. And sing about man goeth forth.

GABRIEL (*Softly*). You sing Eve.

EVE. You first.

(GABRIEL sings the line)

GABRIEL. Now you.

(EVE tries. GABRIEL teaches her extempore. Finally she has it, sings the line triumphantly and laughs)

EVE. I sang it! Now Adam.

ADAM. I'll do even better! Wait! Do the whole end for me Gabriel.

GABRIEL. Listen to me. (*He sings the last two lines*) Now join me.

(*Again extempore, a lesson, until ADAM has the lines*)

ADAM. Now all together!

(*All three sing, and GABRIEL slyly harmonizes*)

ADAM. What did you do? You sang differently this time!

GABRIEL. I will teach you that difference I hope another day. And another day you two shall make up songs of your own choosing songs of your own devising will you not? Promise me.

ADAM. We promise.

EVE. We will make wonderful melodies and fit to them wonderful words.

ADAM. We promise.

GABRIEL. So be it. The Lord God hears and records your promise.

## SCENE FIVE

*(ADAM and EVE are sleeping in the sun, sprawled a few yards from each other. Abundant remnants of eating and drinking lie all about them. Some remains of a roast can be seen on a spit over a fire. Time passes. Then ADAM half awakens, reaches for an opened coconut and drinks from it. He notices that he is perspiring.)*

ADAM. Eve. . . .

EVE. Mmmmmmmmm.

ADAM. It's hot. Wake up.

EVE *(brushing away a fly)*. You're right. Oh, look!

ADAM. At what?

EVE. At the fire. It's smoldering. Take the spit off, will you?

ADAM. Why not you?

EVE. It was you who dropped our bench in the fire. Besides, I ate too much.

ADAM. How many times will I have to hear about that useless bench? Good God! I used our measuring stick to roast the lamb!

EVE. Our measuring stick?

ADAM. Don't you remember?

EVE. I guess . . .

ADAM. It's all blackened.

EVE. Oh Adam, do let me sleep.

ADAM. Well, I'm sleeping in the shade.

EVE. Me too.

*(They drag themselves into the shade, then fall asleep again, snoring pleasantly. Time passes. Birds sing)*

## SCENE SIX

(GOD and GABRIEL. GOD is holding the measuring stick in his hand.)

GOD. I made for them with fibers in their billions  
A brain—oh Gabriel a brain a mere brain  
Made of human flesh can never gather in  
The universe. Yet this brain I made for them  
Was like a bucket to a well decently sufficient  
At least not like a dog's dumbly incompetent.  
Impetuously I added food shelter sunshine rain  
Peace good health and furthermore kept offsprings  
Unborn to them so they might master before breeding  
That which the brain I made for them can hold  
And be to our universe responsive enchantment  
And indeed modest creator and minor god.  
But wretched me I failed. Oh I have failed before  
And wept before but now again. Humbled divinity.  
Some master of my mastery watches us Gabriel  
From a sovereignty impenetrable. So be it.

GABRIEL. What of them my Lord?

GOD. What of you Gabriel?

For you I have another world.

GABRIEL. But what of them?

GOD. Another world new creatures to rule

Made fresh out of new wisdom.

I have discarded brain and all such engines

And will show you from my fund of matter

Better capabilities. This (*he looks at the stick*) is barren.

I am almost ashamed and shall abolish it.

(ADAM and EVE are heard offstage singing their ditty)

ADAM and EVE.

Peaches peaches

Hey hey hey!

Berries berries

Hoo hoo hoo!

(GABRIEL covers his face with his hands)

GOD. I have failed.

But perhaps shall not fail next time.

GABRIEL. What of your promise to them?

GOD. What of their promise to me?

(He pokes with the stick at an apple on the ground and then angrily discards the stick)

ADAM and EVE (still offstage)

Melons melons

Wah wah wah!

Apples apples

Yoh yoh yoh!

GOD. Adam and Eve! Stand before me!

(ADAM and EVE appear. The thundering voice has frightened them. They look apprehensively at GOD and GABRIEL)

ADAM. We obey you my Lord.

GOD. No you do not obey me!

Refractory to our love dead to our teachings

Lazy guzzlers and gapers

Lipping juices and lapping sunshine

Given to you not as your end but for your aid

And by you indolently abused dead

Dead to my great purpose which again and again

He Gabriel and I your Sovereign entreated upon you

When you lapsed promised to rise and lapsed again.

What have you done with my gifts?

How have you not perverted them?

The apple you swore you would not eat

Heedlessly you ate meaning neither good nor ill

Lax lazy inert to my command

Heedlessly broke the covenant between us

The loyalty I made so easy to uphold

And biting that fruit you bit my gentle hand.

ADAM *and* EVE *sobbing*. Forgive us my Lord forgive us!

GOD. In part Eve and Adam I shall.

I know you both grateful merry and affable

Therefore will not reverse your life

But lax lazy and inert I know you too

And therefore will forsake you.

Live but live without me.

Live but live without my angels.

The ministering spirits depart from you.

Earth is yours no longer mine: plough it destroy it

Thrive or die: yours alone yours fair or foul alone.

Us you shall dream of but never meet again.

(GOD *departs*. GABRIEL *approaches* ADAM *and* EVE *and places his hands on their heads*)

ADAM (*sobbing*). You too Gabriel?

EVE (*sobbing*). Forgive us forgive us!

GABRIEL. In God's sweet light you loved one another.

Love one another in your bitter night.

(GABRIEL *departs*)

ADAM *and* EVE. Gabriel, Gabriel!

## SCENE SEVEN

(*Winter. ADAM, clad in heavier skins, is studying and manipulating a variety of branches lying on the ground. Long ropes of creepers and stone tools lie about as well. Every now and then he warms himself at a fire, but he is clearly intent on his problem.*)

ADAM. Eve? Are you back?

(*Enter EVE, carrying a rudimentary net with a fish inside it*)

ADAM. You did catch one! I take it all back! But what's the matter with you?

EVE. I'm exhausted, that's all.

ADAM. Exhausted from catching a fish?

EVE. I'm two people now, man; why do you keep forgetting? And it's a hard clamber down to the river, wading into the current, handling the net, trying not to slip, scrabbling back up with a squirming fish. *Now* do I have the right to be tired?

ADAM. I'm sorry . . .

EVE. And who thought of making a net?

ADAM. You did.

EVE. And who laughed at me?

ADAM. I did. But you'll get two shares out of three, first because you made the net, and second because you're making a child. Come closer to the fire and dry your shins. No question, this is a handsome fish!

EVE. I'm so cold, so bitter cold. I hope the cough won't be clawing at me again. And everywhere that hateful snow.

ADAM. Still, with your net in hand we'll fill our bellies every day for a change until we cross that miserable river.

EVE. Dreamer. You're fooling with your logs and branches cozy near the fire, but I saw again what's left of that bridge of ours. Nothing! Every splinter and pebble carried off to perdition, and it's a miracle *we* remained behind.

ADAM. The stones sank, the wood floated.

EVE. What?



ADAM. That's what stuck fast in my mind. And the leaves float,  
And coconut shells float.

EVE. What are you stirring up this time, Adam? I'd better cut up  
that fish.

ADAM (*excited*). Eve, we'll float across the river too. Tell your fish  
to wait. We'll float sitting on a crisscross of logs. Look. I'll  
take four or five pieces to show you what I mean. We'll have  
to cut them so they match a little better, but that's nothing.  
One, two, three and a lot more side by side; then another row  
on top of them looking the other way. And we tie them at  
the corners—wait—like this, and this, and this, so they hold  
together when the current buffets them.

EVE. And we?

ADAM. We sit on top. What did you think?

EVE. Just sit?

ADAM. No, I don't mean just sit. How would we ever get across?  
And what would keep us from being swept away like the bridge?

EVE. I don't know, Adam. I'm tired. I made the net, and now I  
can't think anymore.

ADAM. But this time I can! We'll do it like the fish. Look at that  
tail. You should have thought of it yourself. I'll flatten out two  
good sturdy branches at one end like fishtails so they catch the  
water, and the upper end I'll keep small and round for us to  
clutch with both hands, and we'll push the water—push push  
push until we reach the other bank.

EVE (*laughing*). My heap of muscles is not so dumb!

ADAM. At last a good word.

EVE. At last?

ADAM. Yes, at last.

(*Pause*)

EVE (*softly*). It's clever, my dearest. But—

ADAM. But?

EVE. Why not simply die?

(*Pause. ADAM is taken aback*)

ADAM. I don't know. All three of us?

EVE. Like that baby bird yesterday frozen to death. Then the snow will have it all. And God can be happy.

ADAM. God won't know. (*Cheerfully*) First let's see whether the raft will hold after I'm done.

EVE. Then why not wait until the river goes down? I'm tired to death hauling and lifting. I've counted the notches. In a few months the water will be down to where we can ford the river without a bridge or anything.

ADAM. We can't wait a few months, woman. The island is dried out.

EVE (*bitterly*). *They* dried it out.

ADAM. No, Eve. It went back to being—natural. But out there, the horses live, we'll forage with them. It's huge, Eve. And if we die we die, but first we'll try not to. Leave the island! Cross the river! Night and day the words hammer at my brain. And as for you, two months from now, how will you run, how will you ride a horse?

EVE (*feeling her belly*). I suppose I'd better feed our guest.

ADAM. Make him strong.

EVE. Make him *smart*.

(*She goes into the cave. ADAM sets to work on the raft or on a paddle. After a mighty whack with a cutting edge he stands back*)

ADAM. Not so dumb after all, you heap of muscles! Never mind!

(*He continues to work, trying to keep his hands from freezing, as the scene darkens and a cold wind blows. He stops working and listens when EVE is heard singing mournfully within the cave*)

EVE.  
Down to the river  
We carry the stone  
Down to the river  
We bear it alone.

ADAM (*takes up the song*)

Lift, humans, lift  
The heavy stone.

Lift crying to heaven:

We bear it alone.

*(He resumes his work, but weeping)*

ADAM. Gabriel, Gabriel . . . .

*(EVE appears, looking at him)*

## SCENE EIGHT

(ADAM and EVE stand almost reverentially on either side of the finished raft, upon which we see a couple of crude paddles and small bundles of belongings. Snow. Cold.)

EVE (*touching the raft*). Won't it sink? Won't it tip over and send us drowning in the current? Won't it carry us too far down where there are no horses?

ADAM (*touching the raft*). We built it, Eve, you and I.

EVE. Yes.

ADAM. The days are short, but if we start now, then tonight, if Fate is willing, we shall be camping on that first row of hills, where the land looks so rich.

EVE. And if Fate is not willing—

ADAM. Farewell Eve, farewell Adam, farewell world, prosper or perish without us.

EVE. Give me your hand.

(EVE leads ADAM toward the cave, where they kneel)

EVE. You parcel of earth, island of gladness and grief, root of our lives, garden that was, we thank you. (*She kisses the ground*)

ADAM. Return to the plants and animals when Spring returns, but do not forget us, hold our love in your root. (*He kisses the ground too. Both remain bowed low for a while, then rise*)

ADAM. I'll take this end, you the other. Grasp it as close to the corners as you can, like this. Ready?

EVE. Ready.

(*They lift the raft and start. ADAM falters, as if to take a last look*)

EVE. Don't turn around, Adam. Walk.

THE END

# **A BEAUTIFUL INVESTMENT**

**Rondo for Stage and Screen**

## CHARACTERS ON STAGE

Mel Broxton

Sol Krakowitz

George O'Malley

Charlie FigmueLLer

Louella Broxton, *Mel's mother*

Ralph Peckam

Mary-Ann, *secretary to Mel and Sol*

Mary-Lou, *secretary to Charlie*

Mary-Belle, *Louella's maid*

## CHARACTERS ON SCREEN

Mr. Elkins

Mrs. Elkins

Their secretary

The foreman

A truck-driver

A buyer

Antonio, a *lad*

The work force

## PRODUCTION NOTES

- (1) While the dialogue and stage directions of the *On Stage* episodes are fixed and not to be tampered with, the *On Screen* segments are suggestive rather than mandatory. They are based on a particular factory to which I had access. Other plants will obviously differ in many details, and producers will adapt their visual directives and the dialogue accordingly. Nevertheless, certain elements in my film scenario must be respected: the beginning/end bracketing by means of the arriving and departing truck (or trucks); the character of Mr. Elkins insofar as I have chosen to sketch it; and above all the sense to be given to the spectators of a worthy enterprise. Needless to say, sentimentalities must be avoided. Designs Unlimited is a decent place for a worker, and an efficient concern, but it is not paradise.
- (2) Whether the screen is placed upstage or downstage is of little moment, but it *is* important that the screen and the characters shown on it be neither diminutive nor gigantic.
- (3) If the temptation arises to portray the *On Stage* characters as gross puppets, it should, I think, be resisted. Here as in the filmed factory, a brisk normalcy prevails.
- (4) Could a series of still photographs, flashed on the screen, be substituted for the film or tape? Possibly; but not without full sound and dialogue.

## ON SCREEN 1

*(The camera approaches a perfectly ordinary one-story industrial building standing to one side of a large fenced-in parking area. A sign: DESIGNS UNLIMITED with ORLANDO, FLORIDA underneath, has been stuck unglamorously over the entrance-way, in keeping with the plain look of the brick establishment itself. The camera circles the building and arrives at the back, where a truck is unloading bolts of fabric. We then move just inside the plant, catching our first overall view by lingering over the unloading, which is performed by the truck-driver and the foreman. As the bolts are being stacked on the floor, the foreman carefully checks them against a purchase order. From the background come the typical mixed noises of machinery, voices trying to rise about the hubbub, several radios blaring away, and the ring of telephones from several cubicles serving as offices.)*

*Much of the dialogue will be created ad hoc at the time of production. It must remain routine and unremarkable, and in the spirit of the samples provided in these notations.)*

FOREMAN. Three months we been waiting for this one.

TRUCK-DRIVER. Wait a minute! There's a bolt left back of the truck.

FOREMAN. What is it?

TRUCK-DRIVER. Looks like more of that Waldorf Brown.

FOREMAN. That'll make Mr. Elkins happy for sure.

*(As they finish unloading, Mr. Elkins walks over from his office. He is an affable and sturdy lover of the pipe who conscientiously empties it and turns its bowl downward whenever he leaves his office)*

FOREMAN. Lots of Waldorf Brown, M. Elkins.

ELKINS. Three months we've been waiting for it.

*(He counts and examines the goods and shouts toward the offices)*

ELKINS. Madge! Four pieces of Waldorf Brown arrived in the truck!

*(Mrs. Elkins appears at her office door)*

MRS. ELKINS. It's about time. Three and a half months!

ELKINS. You can go ahead and schedule it.



MRS. ELKINS. Sure, but don't forget we need two pieces more now that Speck and Speck want—

ELKINS. I'm not forgetting. Send Antonio over to ticket these, will you?

MRS. ELKINS. Right.

FOREMAN. I don't understand. There's an extra bolt of the Dragon Orange we didn't order.

ELKINS. Be sure to send it back, and pin a note to it, will you?

FOREMAN. Will do.

*(Under this, we've heard Mrs. Elkins shouting for Antonio, who is now seen affixing tickets to the bolts identifying them)*

TRUCK-DRIVER. All set, Mr. Elkins? I'm running half an hour late.

*(The secretary appears at the door of her office)*

SECRETARY. Mr. Elkins! It's Mr. O'Malley calling from New York!

ELKINS. Who?

SECRETARY. Mr. O'Malley. George O'Malley. He owns the place, remember?

ELKINS. Right. Tell him I'll be with him in a second. *(Unhurriedly to the truck-driver)* Make sure that Dragon Orange goes back to Summermill, okay?

TRUCK-DRIVER. Don't worry. I'm used to mistakes. Did you sign?

ELKINS. Here you are.

*(As we watch Mr. Elkins sauntering towards his office, we get a general view of the plant and a glimpse of Mr. Elkins on the telephone)*

ELKINS. Hi, Mr. O'Malley, what can I do for you?

## ON STAGE 1

*(O'Malley's office in New York. Mel and O'Malley in conference)*

O'MALLEY. Did I marry your sister or didn't I, Mel? And me a Skibbereen O'Malley mixing it up with a Broxton!

MEL. I don't know if you married her or if she married you. Either way, what's it got to do with the Orlando property?

O'MALLEY. I'll tell you what. But you want some coffee first?

MEL. Don't mind if I do.

O'MALLEY. Let me pour. Help yourself to the sugar-free sugar and the creamless cream.

MEL. Doctor's orders, you know. As I was saying—

O'MALLEY. As *I* was saying, this investment's a beaut, Mel. If I wasn't desperate for cash, I wouldn't have made you fly over from LA, and that's the truth.

MEL. It's an okay investment, I guess, even though you swear it is.

O'MALLEY. Go on!

*(They laugh)*

MEL. But just because Gladys married you doesn't mean I should offer 3% above market.

O'MALLEY. Sure it does. What's 3% to you? Come on. How much are you and Sol gonna put into this deal, I mean out of your own pocket? Come clean.

MEL. What are you talking about, George? The liability alone. You're forgetting the General Partners are lia—

O'MALLEY. Sure sure sure. But the bottom line is: three hundred lousy dollars, Mel. Your offering says so in big print. *(He reads)* "The Partnership was initially funded by capital contributions of \$300"—I still don't believe it! — "\$300 from the Initial Limited Partners." Which is you, Mel Broxton, and that son of Zion, Sol Krakowitz.

MEL. Cash isn't everything, George. Hundreds and hundreds of hours have gone into this—but what the hell, why am I justifying myself, you son-of-a-gun?

O'MALLEY (*leafing through the Offering*). Let's see. "Initial distribution to Initial Limited Partners, \$120,000" —for \$300, Geezes alive! —"66% plus one percent of proceeds from sale or refinancing" —Mel, a genius like you shouldn't gag over three percent. Every brick on that building is gonna turn to gold the moment I hand it over to you—at my price.

MEL. What are you getting at, George? You think I'm some kind of crook?

O'MALLEY. Relax.

MEL. This is going to be a gorgeous investment for everybody concerned. And legitimate. I'm putting my mother into it—your mother-in-law—I'm putting Rosy's parents in it, I'm putting my best friends in it, and you think I'm trying to swindle them?

O'MALLEY. Relax, relax. You go ahead and buy that property for 3% over my best offer because your brother-in-law needs it, otherwise I'm selling it to Morgan and Morgan, you've seen the offer, you know I ain't bluffing. Come on. Not even Sol will know, what the hell, not even Rosy, who cares? Who do you hurt? Nobody, that's who; it's the same fantastic investment it was before, and a year from now, look at the inflation rate, the property will be 10% higher already, Orlando is booming, by Geezes, it's booming like Geezes was gonna land there, Disneyland, sunshine all year round—

MEL. On a warehouse.

O'MALLEY. A factory, Mel, Designs Unlimited, a manufacturing plant, sweet tax regulations, cheap labor pool unlimited, anyway I'm tired, we've gone over the same grounds fifty times in the past twenty-four hours, so let's recap and adjourn, otherwise you'll miss your flight back to LA.

MEL. All right, but under protest.

O'MALLEY. Pour yourself another cup of coffee. Okay. We're talking about \$550,000 down, including commissions etc etc. Okay?

MEL (*reluctantly*). Okay.

O'MALLEY. I take back the note for a million five, due in seven years, interest only at 9.8% per annum.

MEL. Renewable one year beyond.

O'MALLEY. At 11%, plus one point. But you'll never see the day, don't worry.

MEL. I better not.

O'MALLEY. Never, I'm telling you. Three or four years from now, five at the utmost, you'll walk away from Designs Unlimited loaded like a, like a. There's a negative right now, but so what? Your Tustin loan will take care of that. How much are you asking for? I forgot.

MEL. Six hundred thou.

O'MALLEY. To help that Initial Distribution along, eh? (*Mel makes a gesture*). You don't anticipate any problem obtaining it, do you?

MEL. Naw. I know the guy at Tustin Savings, I've dealt with him before.

O'MALLEY. Was that in connection with the Irvine deal?

MEL. And the Pacoima properties. He knows I'm no fly-by-night. Speaking of which, I guess I'd better get a move on if I want to catch my plane. I'll be signing the papers and mailing them to you within the week.

(*He fills his briefcase*)

O'MALLEY. Go on, gloat a little while you're packing, don't put on that fake gloom.

MEL. I'll gloat if you'll gloat, you bastard.

O'MALLEY. It's a deal. Here's my copy of the Offering—it's a masterpiece, Mel, I mean it.

MEL (*snatching it*). It cost us thousands in legal fees alone. Okay, that's it, I'm off.

O'MALLEY. Will Rosy be picking you up at the airport?

MEL. Yep. Say hello to Gladys, will you? Tell her I'm sorry I couldn't make it out to the island this time.

O'MALLEY. She'll understand.

MEL. Boy, look at the sun shining on the Statue of Liberty!

O'MALLEY. Yeah. But it don't come cheap. And get a load of those reflections in the window-panes over there. Son of a gun! The Japanese just bought the building.

MEL. They're all over.

O'MALLEY. How long do you think it'll take you to get that loan approved?

MEL. Couple of weeks. Don't worry, George, I know what I'm doing.

Okay? Stay where you are. I'll whistle for a taxi downstairs.

O'MALLEY. No trouble this time of day. Don't forget to say hello to Rosy and the kids. How old is Bimsy now?

MEL. Seven, two months and a day.

O'MALLEY. Great.

## ON SCREEN 2

*(The offices at Designs Unlimited. They consist of cubicles, one for Mr. Elkins, another for Mrs. Elkins, the third for the secretary. The furniture and equipment are strictly hand-me-down; fabric samples are everywhere; the walls are covered with paperwork, calendars and a few faded posters and picture-postcards suggestive of brief and forgotten holidays; file cabinets overflow with more paperwork. Mrs. Elkins is answering the telephone over the noises of the shop. Again we catch only snatches, like:)*

MRS. ELKINS. I tell you we can't before April 20! *(To the secretary)* Barbara! Get me the Singleton file! *(Back to the phone)* Let me look it up again—hold on a minute!

*(We move on to Mr. Elkins, in conference with the foreman)*

ELKINS. Let's reschedule the Leeds chair so we can make up another Langdale order. They've been after us for a dozen more of the Monicas.

FOREMAN. Either that new salesman of yours is a whiz-kid—what's his name again?

ELKINS. Collins.

FOREMAN. Right. Andy Collins. Or else we're doing something right.

ELKINS. For good old Arizona anyway. Make sure that new girl, you know the one I mean, make sure she puts a ticket on her work plus her initial. She's already forgotten once.

FOREMAN. I'll keep an eye on her, but I've got a hunch she'll be okay.

*(The camera takes us towards seven or eight upholsterers working at their benches. Each upholsterer works on a single chair-frame. Several are carefully molding foam onto the wooden elements, others are attaching the sewn fabric over the foam, others are already fastening the material by means of air-staplers. Close-ups of hands and tools concerned in this skilled work. In the background a girl's voice)*

GIRL. Who took my scissors?

*(Thereupon the camera switches to half a dozen seamstresses, and we discover Mrs. Elkins talking to one of them)*

MRS. ELKINS. These welts for instance. You see. The nap isn't going the same way on them. You can see the difference in the color. It wasn't held properly. Make sure the nap goes *down* all the time you're sewing on it. Feel it. Check your welts when you're finished. Don't put them on anything if the nap isn't going in the same direction all the time. Okay?

SEAMSTRESS. Okay, Mrs. Elkins. Was the boxing I did all right?

MRS. ELKINS. It was fine, Maria.

FOREMAN. Ladies, are you checking your dye-lots? Be sure they're marked, otherwise there'll be a helluva mixup at the end of the line and you know who's gonna catch it from Mrs. Elkins!

MRS. ELKINS. You heard him, ladies. Over here, Antonio.

*(Antonio, rolling a dolly, picks up bundles of sewn fabric from a holding bin in the seamstresses' area)*

ANTONIO *(to one of the women)*. I don't see nothin' from you here.

SEAMSTRESS. Get out of here, you twerp!

*(Laughing, Antonio rolls the dolly to a shelving area, from which one of the upholsterers is just about to pick up a bundle of sewn-up fabric for his work)*

WORKER. How's it going, kid?

FOREMAN *(off-camera)*. Dye-lot 64!

## ON STAGE 2

(*Mel and Sol in their office*)

SOL. When did the check to O'Malley go out?

MEL. It was supposed to go out this morning. Wait. (*Into the intercom*) Mary-Ann? Did you mail out the O'Malley check to New York like I told you? (*We hear Mary-Ann's response, "by Federal Express" etc.*) Fine, thank you.

SOL. You didn't forget those \$10,000 for the appraisal fee, did you?

MEL. No, I didn't.

SOL. Okay. Let's go over these notes. I sat up half the night with them.

MEL. You look it! (*They laugh*) I'd better pour you a cup of coffee.

SOL. Good idea. Hey, what happened to the powdered stuff, the Cremora or what d'you call it?

MEL. It seems to have wound up in my drawer. Here you are.

SOL. Thanks. You too?

MEL. Right.

SOL. So, how does Rosy like this particular deal?

MEL. She's tickled pink.

SOL. Pink. Rosy. (*They laugh*) You shoulda been a nightclub comedian.

MEL. Well, let's face it, it's a beauty. Still, explaining that O'Malley owned the place, that Datatronics was leasing it from him, that Designs Unlimited had a sublease from Datatronics, and that we were trying to move Datatronics out of the picture wasn't all that easy.

SOL. Well, as long as she likes the bottom line. . . . Let's see now. The way I figure it, between payments to O'Malley and Tustin, and assuming the boat don't rock too much in the next three years, we're headed into a shortfall of \$176,500. That's interest only to George and interest and principal to Tustin, with 5% thrown in for contingencies. Those are the big parameters. We'll do better if the interest rates keep level or go down, but that's up to Washington and I'm not counting on it.



MEL (*writing on a pad*). Got it.

SOL. Accounting and legal expenses, \$8,250.

MEL. You being the accounting and me the legal expenses.

SOL. Right. Travel, I estimated \$11,800 to inspect the property as needed.

MEL. Fair enough. I'll send you, you're not married anymore.

SOL. Insurance—

MEL. I thought Datatronics carried full insurance.

SOL. What's full insurance? They carry insurance, but I studied the policy and it ain't enough. Besides, I insured us for rent loss too. You know my motto, Mel: Extra-careful is just careful enough. So I asked Dave—

MEL. Which Dave? Your cousin Dave Epstein?

SOL. Yeah. I asked him to cover us for—

MEL. Forget the details; I trust you.

SOL. Of course you can't get decent coverage for earthquakes, floods, you know, the catastrophes.

MEL. Is Florida earthquake country?

SOL. Oh no. I don't think so. I never heard of an earthquake in Florida. Did you?

MEL. I haven't paid attention. Anyway, how much for Dave?

SOL. \$7,000.

MEL. Well, Dave is a nice guy. What about our management fee? You didn't overdo it, did you? Don't forget I'm putting my mother and my in-laws into this deal.

SOL. And what about my sister and her husband? What a guy! I put us down for ten thou. Over three years, I figure that's more than fair.

MEL. That it is. I feel good about that. I mean, ten thousand for managing, for both of us, over three years—

SOL. Should I have—

MEL. No no, I like it that way. Looks good. I feel good about it.

SOL. Of course I put in \$26,000 for consulting, I mean with reference to the partnership, the tax planning, the whole goddam structure, thousands of hours, let's face it.

MEL. We still owe Bill Kievers \$4,000 for *his* consultation fee.

SOL. I've got \$4,200 here in my notes.

MEL. Right. The point is, I mean for the additional partners, that the tax set-up is half the beauty of this deal, and you don't create a tax situation of this magnitude for nothing. Next?

SOL. Reserves, a hundred thousand, which God willing we'll never need, and the \$120,000 of immediate distribution to the Initial Partners.

MEL. Total—

SOL. \$460,000.

MEL. This means we break it up into ten units of \$46,000 each, nice and easy. What's \$46,000? We should try to sell two units at a time. It doesn't matter, but I figure the fewer partners the less trouble.

SOL. Myra will want two units for sure, and I've had feelers already from her neighbor—you remember the Blooms, don't you?

MEL. Weren't they at her wedding?

SOL. That's right. He was the guy who balanced the empty champagne bottle on his nose.

MEL. How could I forget.

SOL. They were real good to me while I was going through the divorce. Had me over for dinner twice, set me up with a few dates. . . .

MEL. How many units do you think they'll want?

SOL. Two for sure. I want them to get in on this.

MEL. Well, mom is good for two—no more, because I want her to diversify—Rosy's folks will take another two, and tomorrow I'll call the Mandels.

SOL. Who are they?

MEL. Friends of the family. The wives especially. Adrienne and Rosy do fancy lunches at the Rex and places like that while I munch on a lousy sandwich here in the office.

SOL. My heart bleeds for you.

MEL. Not that they can basically afford a deal like this, if you know what I mean, but they're on salaries and they're looking for a decent tax-shelter plus eventual appreciation.

SOL. Fine with me. That pretty much sews it up, don't it?

MEL. Right. Let me see that pile of papers again, will you? How many projections did you run through the computer?

SOL. Five, with three different resale prices five years from closing of escrow.

MEL. Looks good. I'll take the figures home and go over them after dinner.

SOL. Good idea. You know something?

MEL. What?

SOL. This deal has gone almost too smooth. It worries me. Remember the Pacoima property?

MEL. Don't remind me. I still get nightmares.

## ON SCREEN 3

*(The camera inspects the cutter at his long cutting table, in conference with Mr. Elkins)*

CUTTER. What do you think? There must be 15 to 18 yards of this stuff fu-mucked up, I'd say.

ELKINS. Let's see how bad it really is.

CUTTER. I could cut around it, but—

ELKINS. Yeah, and waste I don't know, \$500 worth of material, not to mention your time.

CUTTER. You in a rush for this?

ELKINS. Well, yes and no. I like to be ahead. Look at this! Geez, talk about quality control.

CUTTER. Usually they're okay.

ELKINS. Roll it up and I'll send it back. I figure we'll get it replaced in a couple of weeks, and I can live with that. Did you finish cutting the Paradise Magenta?

CUTTER. I finished that one yesterday. Maybe you need a couple extra girls at the sewing machines. These layers just seem to melt ever since we got our knife fixed.

*(The secretary emerges from her office)*

SECRETARY. Mr. Elkins, there's a guy on the phone who wants to talk to you about Italian frames.

ELKINS. Did you tell him we already import from Italy?

SECRETARY. I did; he says he knows but he has another line he thinks you'll like.

ELKINS. Okay, I'm coming!

*(As he saunters toward the office, the camera sweeps toward the foreman, who is testing nearly finished chairs—their backs are not made up—by sitting in them, checking the straightness and smoothness of the fabric, etc. Past the foreman, the camera focuses in on the springer, who, taking chair and sofa frames from stacks, busily attaches the springs to them. Near him several sprung frames are waiting to be upholstered, and behind him we see a large storage area for fabrics)*

VOICE. Gimme a hand, will you?

VOICE. Antonio!

*(Several toots from a horn)*

VOICES. Lunch-wagon!

VOICE. Pick that up, you wonkhead! You ate breakfast, didn't you?

*(We follow the general rush towards the lunch-wagon parked at the loading dock. In Elkins' office, Mrs. Elkins is unwrapping some sandwiches)*

MR. ELKINS. I need a rest! And so do you, sweetie.

*(He lights his pipe)*

MRS. ELKINS. How about selling out and retiring to the Bahamas?

MR. ELKINS *(laughing)*. Sure!

## ON STAGE 3

*(Charlie Figmueller's office. His secretary introduces Mel into the office)*

MEL. Thank you.

*(Figmueller rises and shakes Mel's hand)*

FIGMUELLER. Mr. Broxton. Welcome to Datatronics. Welcome to proud Atlanta.

MEL. Mr. Figmueller. It's a pleasure to meet you.

FIGMUELLER. Call me Charlie, will you?

MEL. If you'll call me Mel.

FIGMUELLER. Why not? Two years we've been exchanging letters and talking on the phone. Sit down, sit down.

MEL. That's one offer I'll accept! It's been a long trip, and a bumpy flight.

FIGMUELLER. You flew from L.A. via Dallas?

MEL. Right. I got in early enough so I could check in at the Sheraton and have a bite of lunch before coming here.

FIGMUELLER. Listen, I want to apologize again about lunch, but that software fellow from IBM—

MEL. Don't give it another thought, *please*. I understand perfectly.

FIGMUELLER. Maybe you'd like a cup of coffee, though.

MEL. Well, I've had two already, but I'm willing to go for a third.

FIGMUELLER. Good. I'll join you.

*(He rings for the secretary, who enters)*

SECRETARY. Yes, Mr. Figmueller?

FIGMUELLER. Would you bring us some coffee, Mary-Lou?

SECRETARY. I sure will, Mr. Figmueller. *(Exit)*

FIGMUELLER. Let's see now. As I recall, you purchased that Orlando property two years ago—

MEL. Well actually it's been three years and a month.

FIGMUELLER. From Tim O'Malley was it, in New York?

MEL. George O'Malley.

FIGMUELLER. Sorry! We've got our fingers in so many pies here at Datatronics, I sometimes forget where my thumb is at the moment. Of course it's all in our computers, and the only thing a guy has to remember these days is where the on/off switch is located.

(*They laugh*)

SECRETARY (*entering*). Coffee everybody.

FIGMUELLER. Thanks. Put the tray here, will you? Let me move that clock. That's all, Mary-Lou, we'll help ourselves. Has that letter gone out to Electrobionics?

SECRETARY. I'm working on it right now, Mr. Figmueller.

FIGMUELLER. Fine; lemme see it before it goes out. (*She leaves; Figmueller pours coffee*). Milkora? I'm supposed to stay away from dairy products.

MEL. Same here. And I'll have some of that Diet-sweet. To answer your question, we did buy it from O'Malley.

FIGMUELLER. Good man, old Tim.

MEL. We knew of course that Datatronics never had moved to Orlando.

FIGMUELLER. Well, it's a long story. At the time we signed with O'Malley—actually, that was done before I became vice-president here—we thought we might open a location in the area. But then came the recession, for a while Taiwan clobbered us, plus some internal shake-ups—a long story, but here I am—and that's when we took advantage of the subleasing clause and signed up Designs Unlimited. They're an A-1 outfit, never had any problems.

MEL. It's turned out well for you, hasn't it?

FIGMUELLER. What do you mean?

MEL. I mean, you're leasing from us at \$2.05 a square foot and getting \$2.47 from D.U.

FIGMUELLER. Pennies. And more trouble, let me tell you, than it's worth. By now Datatronics has expanded to the point where running a real estate sideline is a hell of a nuisance.

MEL. I agree with you 100% and in fact I've got it on my agenda to talk to you about just that. But first—as long as you *are* on that lease—well, Charlie, you know what brings me to Atlanta.

FIGMUELLER. A nuisance, I tell you!

MEL. Well, the nuisance is spread around pretty evenly for all of us. But the contract is clear, Charlie; that parking area has got to be fixed, and it's up to Datatronics to fix it.

FIGMUELLER. Our lawyers think otherwise.

MEL. That's what they're paid to do. I'm a lawyer too, Charlie. Hey, good coffee!

FIGMUELLER. Mary-Lou grinds it fresh. The point seems to be that we're responsible for the building, we're not responsible for the parking area. I mean, we're not responsible for damage we haven't caused—we or D.U., that is. The Orlando property was built on landfill—

MEL. No secret about that. That's why the building is set on pilings. Due precautions have been taken. But you can't place a parking area on pilings, Charlie.

FIGMUELLER. Which means that those holes are an act of God. Come on, Mel, you know as well as I do that the landlord is responsible.

MEL (*producing the contract*). "The tenant shall have the responsibility of maintaining the building and adjacent areas." What could be clearer? If a parking lot isn't adjacent I don't know what in heaven's name could be.

FIGMUELLER. I'm not denying the adjacent bit. I'm saying that maintaining doesn't mean fixing up acts of God.

MEL. The exclusions are specified, my friend. On page 16, paragraph 3. Earthquakes, floods, riots and acts of war; there's no exclusion of earth *settling* under the asphalt.

FIGMUELLER. Well then, who's the tenant? Go talk to Designs Unlimited, to Rudy Elkins. *They're* the tenants, dammit.

MEL. No, sir; you're my tenant; don't try to pass the buck. D.U.'s not involved; they don't figure in our conversation.

FIGMUELLER. How much are we talking about anyway?

MEL. Around \$50,000. The bids don't vary much.

FIGMUELLER. Hell, we're not gonna litigate over fifty grand, are we?



MEL. I don't know. I'm not Datatronics. Fifty grand is a lot of money for me.

FIGMUELLER. But aside from that, who cares about a few sags in a parking lot? Should you and I be fussing over a parking lot? It seems so damn *petty* if you know what I mean.

MEL. There's nothing petty about those potholes. I don't mean to be funny, but they sink the value of the property.

FIGMUELLER. Have you seen them?

MEL. I've seen the pictures and the report.

FIGMUELLER. The cars tilt a wee bit when they go over the little depressions or when they're parked inside them. It's not as if any damage was caused.

MEL. Not today, but tomorrow it'll get worse and we'll get sued. In part we're talking about preventive medicine. Those repairs must be made.

FIGMUELLER. Tell you what, Mel. You said you wanted to talk about that lease renewal.

MEL. Yes, but—

FIGMUELLER. Listen. If you cooperate with us—because, as you said yourself, subleasing to D.U. has been a bonanza for us. It's not our line of business, we're strictly high-tech—I'm an engineer, dammit—but the fact is, we're making money in Orlando and the stockholders aren't complaining about that. Still and all, we know you'd like us not to exercise the renewal option when the time comes, and we're willing to play ball with you if you play ball with us.

MEL. What do you suggest? I'm flexible—up to a point.

FIGMUELLER. My suggestion is to leave the goddam lawyers out of this—no offense intended. They tell me we're in a very strong position—believe me! —but the hell with that. Get the work done, we'll split the tab, and that'll clear the deck for the renewal business. In fact, I think if I let my lawyers talk with Elkins, we can scare him into assuming a third of the cost. Elkins is a busy fellow; I'm figuring he won't want to mess around with lawyers. Anyway, I can give it a try.

MEL. Well . . . . I don't know what Sol will say. I don't know whether I have the authority—

FIGMUELLER. Plenty of time. You wanna talk to Sol first?

MEL. I don't know. But one thing is sure. He won't even talk to me if I haven't got the agreement in writing.

FIGMUELLER. About the parking lot?

MEL. No; about the sublease.

FIGMUELLER. In writing?

MEL. Absolutely. Tell you what. Let's package this deal: we go halves or thirds on the parking lot, and we delete the renewal option.

FIGMUELLER. Looks to me like a pretty uneven bargain, Mel.

MEL. Why? I figure you stick to silicon chips and I'll take care of the real estate.

FIGMUELLER. We might do it, Mel; but for a consideration; when the time comes. Right now—

MEL. Right now it seems to me I should give you time to think it over and discuss it with your people. Considerations don't appeal to me, but let's hear your proposal anyway. Why don't you give me a ring in Los Angeles sometime next week?

FIGMUELLER. Sure thing. I've got a feeling we'll find a way out of this that'll satisfy all parties.

MEL. I'm sure we will, Charlie. Well—I guess that's it. (*He rises*) I'll tell you, though—it's been a real pleasure talking to you face to face.

FIGMUELLER. It always helps. Lemme walk you to the elevator. (*On their way out*) Next time you visit Datatronics I'll take you to the club—we'll do eighteen holes together. . . .

## ON SCREEN 4

*(A worker is stapling flounces to nearly finished chairs. The foreman passes by and checks for straightness and even pleats. He gives the worker a friendly pat on the back. Elsewhere, standing up at a boxing machine—a box is the lateral strip of fabric going on a cushion—a seamstress is feeding her material attentively into the machine so that the welts will be sewn on straight. Close-up of the basket into which the welted boxing falls. The camera cuts to Mr. Elkins on the telephone, puffing at his pipe)*

ELKINS. I appreciate your calling. Most buyers don't bother: I know we're all right if I just don't hear nothing from them. Fine. I'm glad. Well, you know, these people, most of 'em, they've been with the firm gosh I don't even know how many years. Exactly. You want repeat orders, we tell 'em, do the work right and do it right the first time. Sure, we check for pitch, each unit.

*(In Mrs. Elkins' office, a well-dressed buyer is looking over a catalogue)*

MRS. ELKINS. We've been manufacturing this couch for five years; it's one of our best sellers.

BUYER. Can you make it up in all three sizes?

MRS. ELKINS. Any size you want.

BUYER. Is the Executive model on page 24 the one Speck and Speck bought from you a couple of years ago?

MRS. ELKINS. A couple of years and ever since. As a matter of fact, you can look at some on the floor right now. But there's a slightly modified type you might like. Wait, let me show you.

*(The camera looks in on the secretary, who is typing a letter and muttering to herself)*

SECRETARY. Yours untruly if you really want to know my mind.

*(Her telephone rings)*

SECRETARY. Designs Unlimited of Orlando, hello. Oh, hi there; everything's fine, thank you; sure; I'll page him, he must be somewhere on the floor. Hold the phone.

*(She rises and goes to her door)*

SECRETARY. Mr. Elkins!

*(Over her shoulders, at some distance, we see Mr. Elkins arguing a point with the foreman over some documents on a clipboard)*

ELKINS. What now?

SECRETARY. It's Mr. Broxton on the phone in L.A.!

ELKINS. Who?

SECRETARY. Mr. Broxton. Mel Broxton. God.

ELKINS. In that case tell him I'll be with him in a minute.

SECRETARY. Okay.

*(Elkins pursues his argument with the foreman)*

SECRETARY. He'll be right over, Mr. Broxton.

*(She goes on typing her letter. As Elkins saunters into his office to pick up the telephone, the camera proceeds outward onto the floor for an overview, including the foreman now arguing with the cutter over the same documents, as we hear Elkins' voice behind us)*

ELKINS. Good to hear from you, Mr. Broxton. What can I do for you? . . . No doubt about it . . . Right . . . Well, it's a nuisance all right; who likes holes in his parking lot? So? Aha . . . Say that again? . . . I see . . . I see . . . Well . . .

## ON STAGE 4

(*In Louella Broxton's upper-class condominium. Louella is lying comfortably on a couch wrapped in a blanket and reading a vast art book. Friendly knock at the door*)

VOICE OF MEL. Anybody home?

LOUELLA. Only your mother.

(*Enter Mel*)

MEL. Hi mom. Have I got great news! (*Kisses her*) But first I want my usual.

LOUELLA. I think it's ready. Mary-Belle!

VOICE OF MARY-BELLE. Yes, Mrs. Broxton!

LOUELLA. My son is here.

DITTO. Everything's sitting on the tray; I'll be there in a jiffy.

MEL. Hey, don't you want to hear the news?

LOUELLA (*always placid*). Of course I do. But you said after the coffee. Have you called Rosy about it whatever it is?

MEL. Of course. We're dining at the La Vrai Bistro to celebrate.

LOUELLA. The one in la vrai Beverly Hills?

MEL. Right. Well—and how are you? Did you just come back from the museum?

LOUELLA. About an hour ago. The Giacometti exhibit is opening on June 24, so we're required to bone up before we start showing the Mels and Rosys around.

MEL. Let's see. (*Whistling*) Now I know what skinny means! This guy never lived in Southern California.

LOUELLA. I don't know; there must be a *few* gaunt people in town, but I guess they don't inflict themselves on Century City. All right, what's the news?

(*Enter Mary-Belle with coffee etc. on a silver tray*)

MEL. Hi old chum.

MARY-BELLE. Hi Mr. Broxton. How is Mrs. Broxton and the kids?

MEL. Everybody's fab, and Bimsy is learning to surf. How's the arthritis in the left index?

MARY-BELLE. The arthritis is ruining my life, Mr. Broxton, but otherwise I'm getting on okay.

MEL. Well, that's what counts.

MARY-BELLE. Anything else, Mrs. Broxton? Here's your real cream, and the usual for Mr. Broxton.

LOUELLA. Thank you, Mary-Belle.

MARY-BELLE. See you all later.

(Exit)

MEL (after her). Try aerobics! (To Louella) Shall I pour? See how I can draw things out too? (He pours)

LOUELLA. Thank you, dear, and help yourself to the cookies.

MEL. I'd better not. Well!

LOUELLA. Well?

MEL. We have—hold your breath—an *offer* on the Orlando property!

LOUELLA. How sweet.

MEL. How sweet! I am toiling night and day to make you rich—

LOUELLA. I'm rich already.

MEL. Twice as rich, and you hardly pay attention.

LOUELLA. I delegate my attention to you, dear. Too many attentions spoil the broth. I hope the offer was a good one.

MEL. Two million five! And from Equitable, so it's not some hot air balloon.

LOUELLA. Is that a lot more than we paid for it?

MEL. Almost 20% over! Just as I predicted at the start!

LOUELLA. Very nice. They must really like Orlando.

MEL. They got to like it real well after they heard through the grapevine that Datatronics wasn't exercising their option to renew.

LOUELLA. To renew what?

MEL. Oh my God, you've forgotten again. Not to renew their lease. We're the landlords now, we'll be collecting rent and calling the shots, the partners, that's you, won't have to put up the final capital installment on the partnership, and D.U., which *doesn't* have an option to renew, will either bleed a little or else look for other quarters.

LOUELLA. Is that nice of us?

MEL. They can afford it, believe me; they're paying a solid 10% under market right now.

LOUELLA. Poor D.U. . . . What does D.U. stand for?

MEL. Designs Unlimited.

LOUELLA. How interesting. And what does Designs Unlimited do for the happiness of mankind?

MEL. They build museums full of Giacomettis.

LOUELLA. No, really, Mel. I want to know who I'm evicting or whom.

MEL. You're not evicting a soul, because they're sure to pay the reasonable rent you're going to ask for; and they make furniture.

LOUELLA. Well, mankind does need furniture. I'm glad. Maybe Rosy and I should buy some of it. Do they make tables and chairs, marble and glass things, upholstered pieces—?

MEL. Who cares? They're reliable, that much I can tell you. I think they make upholstered furniture.

LOUELLA. Traditional? Contemporary? Nice? Vulgar?

MEL. What kind of questions are those?

LOUELLA. I don't know. Simple questions, I guess.

MEL. And what has all this got to do with what *we're* doing?

LOUELLA. Nothing; I'm quite sure of that.

MEL. Exactly. Anyway, maybe they don't even *make* furniture; maybe they just stuff it. They receive the stuff unstuffed at one end of the building, they stuff it in the middle, and they ship it stuffed to Palm Beach at the other end.

LOUELLA. Now you're getting silly. Hand me a cookie. I don't know whether Giacometti would have approved.

MEL. The point I hope you won't forget is that our investment is flourishing. D.U.'s only a phase, for us or for the next buyer, Equitable or whoever. Because that chunk of land is hot, and I'm not sure we shouldn't build on it ourselves in a year or two.

LOUELLA (*still placid*). A year or two? Why not five? I haven't seen a penny so far, and God only knows how many months have gone by. I'm past counting them.

MEL. Are you serious or are you putting on an act?

LOUELLA. I won't know until I've introspected.

MEL (*pulling out papers*). Look, mom. In the first year you put in \$42,000.

LOUELLA. I remember. It was a wrench.

MEL. That year the paper loss amounted—for you, for the Mandels, for Rosy's folks, for everybody—to about \$34,000 a piece. Since you're in the 50% bracket, you saved about \$17,000 in taxes. The following year you paid in \$13,200 and you saved over \$18,000 in taxes. The year after that—

LOUELLA. Et cetera, et cetera. Oscar told me the other night that we're a gang of parasites battenning on the capitalist system. I had the Mandels over for dinner with the Dudleys, remember?

MEL (*good-humored*). The son of a bitch! I'm pouring money into his beggar's cap and he insults me! Do you think I would have let him take his two units if Rosy hadn't begged me to invest their scroungy savings? If Adrienne wasn't a good-looking girl—

LOUELLA. He said he was sorry he wasn't a playwright.

MEL. A playwright? Why?

LOUELLA. Because he'd write a comedy about us. It sounded ever so funny. The Dudleys were in stitches. You know how brilliant he is.

MEL. I do? How come I never noticed before?

LOUELLA. He said he'd write a series of scenes showing how all of us are pocketing gobs of money wheeling and dealing, and in between—I mean in between the scenes—you know, the scenes of wheeling and dealing—he'd have a screen come down in front or in back of the stage or *some* place and show a movie of the really *productive* goings on at the factory—workers at work, trucks loading and unloading, "virtuous capitalism" he called it—

MEL. The guy is crazy.

LOUELLA. Not minding our shenanigans a bit, just producing, producing the goods and making the decent profit they deserve.

MEL (*still good-humored*). The son of a bitch. And doesn't he object to being a parasite himself?



LOUELLA. That's what Peggy Dudley asked him, and he said he does, but he doesn't enough.

MEL. Ha ha ha ha! I like that! And what was he going to call his brilliant play?

LOUELLA. "The Fabulous Transaction" or some such. But now you know why I asked you what they make at the factory or warehouse or whatever. He didn't know, and I didn't know. And of course our not knowing, and your not knowing, was going to be part of the comedy. I can call him up now and tell him about the upholstered furniture.

MEL. In other words, you'd be willing to feed the jackal who wants to tear your son to pieces.

LOUELLA. That's right. Reach me one more cookie, will you? What with the cookies and the tax write-offs, you're nourishing the mother who would feed the jackal who wants to tear her son to pieces.

MEL. Good thing for him he's *not* a playwright. I'd sue the little bastard for every dime he's making off of me. Seriously, mom, now that Datatronics is out of the picture, I can practically promise the partners that, besides not having to put up the last ten thousand, they can be pretty sure of a cash distribution within the year. That's not a promise, it's not a guarantee, but it's practically a certainty.

LOUELLA. That's my Mel. I wish your dad could have seen the day.

MEL. Well, I'd better be on my way. Any message for Rosy?

LOUELLA. Tell her I love her. And thank you, dear, for stopping by with the news.

MEL. It was a pleasure. (*He kisses Louella and goes*) So long, Mary-Belle! Thanks for the coffee!

VOICE OF MARY-BELLE. Good-bye, Mr. Broxton! Regards to the family and specially to Bimsy!

## ON SCREEN 5

*(Mr. Elkins is talking to the springer)*

ELKINS. I've been on the phone with the customs broker. We're picking up those frames around 10 A.M. tomorrow, so you can schedule them for right after lunch.

SPRINGER. I look forward to that batch, Mr. Elkins. They're made solid. It's a pleasure.

*(The camera moves on to the cutter, whose electric knife is slicing through layers of fabric. Antonio is picking up bundles of ticketed fabric and dollying them to the seamstresses. Mrs. Elkins is checking flouncing as the foreman did before. Mr. Elkins joins her)*

ELKINS. Those two dye lots from Burlingame came out so different—

MRS. ELKINS. You mean that Bristol linen again?

ELKINS. No, those were pretty even. I mean that green celadon what you call it they sent over. One of the lots looks pink to me if you really want to know.

MRS. ELKINS. I guess I noticed it too. Well, the girls will have to be extra careful. We ought to put up a big sign for them: ONE BUNDLE, ONE DYE LOT. I hate it when—

*(The foreman approaches)*

FOREMAN. Those couches came out perfect. Not a flaw in the lot of them.

ELKINS. Good. One less wrinkle in my face.

*(The camera wanders in a leisurely manner towards the secretary, who is again typing a letter and muttering to herself)*

SECRETARY. One t or two t's? Two looks nicer.

*(Close up on rapid typing)*

## ON STAGE 5

*(In Mel's office. Mel, Sol, and Ralph Peckam)*

PECKAM. You got some of that powdered polyester cream?

MEL. Here it is.

PECKAM. Doctor's orders, you know. Besides, it tastes better than dairy cream.

MEL. I think so too. But shouldn't we celebrate this with a bottle of bourbon? Mary-Ann keeps one in her cupboard for special occasions.

PECKAM. Not at 11 A.M., Mel, but thanks anyway.

MEL. You know, you could have knocked me over with a feather when Sol greeted me with the news—

SOL. Yeah, you should have seen his face. He came in maybe ten minutes after I'd hung up—I says to him, "Guess what, Mel?" And he says, "You're engaged to a girl from Yemen," and I say "Better than that, Ralph Peckam wants to buy Orlando." "What," he says, "Ralph Peckam, Rosy's cousin?"

MEL. I never expected—

PECKAM. Sure, but sooner or later it was bound to happen. The residential market has just about caved in. I've been flopping around like a fish outa water. So I says to myself, "Broxton is in industrial, why shouldn't Peckam be in industrial too?" Besides, dealing with you, well, you know, I guess I feel you'll be straight with a cousin of Rosy's on the Indiana side.

MEL. We'll be straight with you all right, provided you don't expect any special favors. Business is business.

PECKAM. I'm not asking for special favors. But here's an example of what I mean. I didn't want to ask you on the telephone, but it's an important question.

MEL. Shoot.

PECKAM. Have any of them internal revenueurs come snooping around this deal over the years? It's only fair you should tell me now and give me an out.

MEL. Would I conceal that kind of a booby trap from you or from any buyer for that matter? Come on, Ralph, give me a *little* credit, will you?

PECKAM. Sorry but—

MEL. Anyway, you can relax. The tax picture is spotless. Sol and I structured this deal 100% legitimate; there hasn't been an audit within twenty miles of it.

SOL. There might have been one, you know, if Congress hadn't killed the Bradley-Martinez bill—because of that 277% write-off in the third year, you know. But once that was squashed in committee—

PECKAM. Fine, I won't give it another worry. Now, as I was saying before, I'm not asking for any favors. Just lemme hear the facts again.

MEL. The main fact, my friend, is that we turned down a bid for two million eight hundred thousand, which gives *you* a five-minute opening to get your hands on this gorgeous investment.

PECKAM. I know, I know.

MEL. But the Tustin balance is coming due—

PECKAM. How much is left of that again?

MEL. Over four hundred thousand, and coming due in eight months. We have to move fast, either sell or refinance, and remember, we can refinance any moment and make a handsome distribution to the partnership.

PECKAM. Well, I'm not gonna beat around the bush. I trust you. And I've got cash sitting in my lap, more than I know what to do with right now. I'll give you the two million nine, provided you fix the roof and pay the insurance premiums for two years like I agreed with Sol.

SOL. We can live with that. And you'll get the property in A-1 ship-shape hotsy-totsy condition.

PECKAM. Fine. We're talking about \$800,000 down, I take over your first which is — damn, I forgot again.

MEL. A million and a half. Keep in mind we've been paying interest only on this note. Parker has okayed your assuming the debt at 12% plus a point.

PECKAM (*using his pocket calculator*). Eight hundred thousand down, a million five makes two million three, which leaves six hundred thou in paper for you, amortized over ten years—

SOL (*consulting a document*) Quote, at 4% over the monthly Weighted Average Cost of Funds for Eleventh District Savings Institutions, as published by the Federal Home Loan Bank, and to be adjusted monthly, unquote.

PECKAM. Tough, fellas, tough.

MEL. Maybe so. But more than manageable. Designers Unlimited is good for another 5% rent hike in January, and I don't have to tell you about Orlando. The place is going crazy. In another five years they'll want to knock down that dumb factory for an insurance skyscraper or a shopping mall. Send us a box of chocolates when that happens, will you?

PECKAM. Well, the deal looks okay. Besides, I like the fact that we've cut out the brokerage commissions et cetera, and that Rosy's folks are gonna be ahead too.

MEL. We're all glad for them, after that stroke he suffered.

PECKAM. I guess the papers are drawn up, aren't they?

SOL. They'll be ready tomorrow morning. *I think we should unzip that bottle of bourbon at this point.*

PECKAM (*looking at his watch*). At this point, why not? A quick one before lunch.

MEL (*into the intercom*). Mary-Ann, bring in the bourbon, will you, and a pitcher of water, ice, and three glasses, okay? Thanks. I've made reservations for the three of us at Yamato. It's close by and I remember you like Japanese food.

PECKAM. What I like is taking off my shoes. (*They laugh*) But you—

(*Mary-Ann enters with the drinks*)

MARY-ANN. This all right, Mr. Broxton?

MEL. Perfect. Thank you. Lock up if you want to and take your lunch break; we'll be going out shortly ourselves, but Wendy will take calls.

MARY-ANN. Okay then. I'll be on my way. (*She leaves*)

PECKAM. I don't know. I take 'em a lot younger.

MEL. Bad for concentration.

PECKAM. What was I gonna say? Oh yeah – remember I gotta run down to Palms to talk to my manager there before lunch.

MEL. I didn't forget. I made the reservation for twelve-thirty.

SOL. Is that the 42 units you own down there?

PECKAM. Yeah. Now and then I take a look around, though I trust the old guy. Okay boys, fill up. No water, thank you.

MEL. Sol?

SOL. Half and half.

MEL. Well, here's to us, and to a beautiful investment all around.

SOL and PECKAM. To a beautiful investment.

MEL. Another round?

PECKAM. No, thanks. That was great. Okay fellas, see you later.

MEL. Tell you what. We'll wait for you down in the lobby at twelve fifteen.

PECKAM. Fine, I'll be there. So long.

MEL and SOL. See you.

(Exit. A pause)

MEL. Well.

SOL. Well.

MEL. I'm sort of proud of us.

SOL. Just what I was thinking.

MEL. I did well, you did well, Peckam is doing well, the partners will be doing well, what more does anybody want?

SOL. And you know something else?

MEL. What?

SOL. You're gonna laugh at me.

MEL. No, I'm not, I swear. *What* else?

SOL. It's a great country.

MEL. Is that what?

SOL. Yeah. It's a great country!

MEL. Sure.

SOL. Everybody contributing and getting their reward. My granpa was a tailor in Poland. Can you imagine?

MEL. Mine was a solicitor in Liverpool.

SOL. See what I mean? Soliciting. From nothin. That's why I think this Reno Nevada package is worth looking into. We might lose our shirts, but we *could* wind up making a killing.

MEL. I'll study it some more tonight.

SOL. Two twenty-eight per square foot in an area that's worth a good two ninety, and that's net, net, net.

MEL. Net, net, net?

SOL. Yeah. Net, net, net.

MEL. Hm. Net, net, net . . .

*(They dream)*

## ON SCREEN 6

*(Crates are being loaded onto the truck. Mr. Elkins is talking to the truck-driver)*

ELKINS. You stick to your route no matter what.

TRUCK-DRIVER. But suppose they haven't opened up the exit ramp from the 607? Shouldn't I make my drop at Ozick Limited first?

ELKINS. No way. That's just what I'm trying to explain to you. Major emergency? Okay. Call me, but don't change the route on your own.

TRUCK-DRIVER. I hear you.

*(The secretary appears)*

SECRETARY. Mr. Elkins!

ELKINS. What now?

SECRETARY. It's Mr. Peckam long distance.

ELKINS. Who?

SECRETARY. Mr. Peckam. Ralph Peckam. The landlord.

ELKINS. Tell him to hold his horses; I'm coming.

*(A worker has approached Mr. Elkins)*

WORKER. Do I load that damaged chair that's been sitting here a week, Mr. Elkins?

ELKINS. Geez, I'd forgotten all about that chair. Ask Mike whether it's okay with him. He's in the cab, I think.

WORKER. Will do.

*(The camera is now high above the shop floor, though we see Elkins sauntering toward his office. We catch sight of Mrs. Elkins gesticulating with one of the upholsterers over a couch in the works, we fly past the busy seamstresses, then, still from on high, and at a distance, we see and hear Mr. Elkins)*

ELKINS. Mr. Peckam, Elkins speaking, what can I do for you? . . . Oh, not bad. We've seen better days, but then who hasn't, and we've seen worse. What's on your mind? *(To Mrs. Elkins, who has just come in)* As if I didn't know.



*(The camera sweeps on, and returns to the loading dock just in time to show the back panel being noisily shut. The truck departs. It diminishes in the distance, passes through the perimeter gate, and exits onto the highway beyond, as letters on the screen spell out:)*

**THE END**

## APPENDIX A

### REPAIRS TO PAST PLAYS

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#### I

#### GENERAL AUDAX in COLLECTED PLAYS, VOLUME ONE

**Correction on page 55, line 13:**

woman *should read* ] women

#### II

#### LIVING ROOM WITH 6 OPPRESSIONS in COLLECTED PLAYS, VOLUME ONE

**Correction on page 101, line 25:**

Mexican *should read* ] Mexicans

**Page 104 and throughout:**

All references to Zimbustan should be changed to Katshungu.

**New reading for page 109, lines 24-27:**

MATTHEW. Officer, for God's sake! This is the Ambassador of Katshungu!

POLICEMAN. Oh yeah? In that case let him sneeze till his pals come running to save him.

NEGRO (*in the doorway*). Sneezing won't be necessary. (*He blows his whistle*)

**Etc.**

## III

## PROFESSOR SNAFFLE'S POLYPON

## In COLLECTED PLAYS, VOLUME TWO

**A. New reading for page 65, beginning from the top:**  
*descends from the flies*).

PAPPENDECK. Here is your equipment, Professor Snaffle.

SNAFFLE. Ah, and my computer, standing at my side, ready as always to multiply my genius.

PAPPENDECK (*patting the computer*). I don't know, sir. Poor XLK Epsilon 7 was complaining a little this morning.

SNAFFLE. Why?

PAPPENDECK. It came to her random access memory that you hadn't given her much to chew on in the past few weeks. Here's what she printed out.

SNAFFLE. "Boot me up, dummy, or else." Dear little XLK! You can't know yet that I'm planning to interface you with the Stanford Universal Dixit.

LOOP (*a tear in his eye*). Nor that we're going to program her to make new little programs all on her own.

PAPPENDECK (*deeply moved*). He loves every chip in her body.

SNAFFLE. Come, gentlemen, let us address ourselves single-mindedly to our problem. Hand me a research tool.

Etc.

**B. New reading on page 69 for Snaffle's second speech:**

SNAFFLE. Possibly. But the scientist is always ready to be the martyr of his own experiments. Forward. Boot up old XLK. More data coming. March! I'll plunge a beam of photons into the Polyp. Hand me the camera, but first clamp it to a pole.

**Etc.**

**C. New reading on page 70 for Snaffle's second speech:**

**SNAFFLE.** First, then, I bombard the Polypon with particles of infra-matter at various angles of incidence, rates of dispersion, and curves of alacrity. You'll check the responses and feed them to XLK. Next I dig in with thermocouples.

**Etc.**

**D. New reading on page 70 for lines 22-25:**

*Molecule cries "Save our garden!" while from Snaffle we hear "A reaction is setting in!" etc. Loop takes readings and punches them into the XLK in a frenzy. Next, Snaffle grasps a long pole and pokes about the Polypon, uprooting shrubs, striking the tots, etc. Cries of "I'm bleeding! I'm*

**Etc.**

**E. New reading on page 70 for lines 33-36:**

*Polypon with a black liquid. The tots scurry about; the scene is a shambles. Isotope is howling, Snaffle is pumping, Loop is reading and punching, XLK is beeping. Finally Snaffle, crying "a multiple experiment!" manages to set going simultaneously inside the Polypon*

**Etc.**

**F. New reading for page 71, beginning with line 2:**

**SNAFFLE** (*descending and wiping his face*). Woof! That was a job of a job.

**LOOP.** I too feel exhausted, Professor Snaffle. Considering my age and the radiation I've swallowed in my time. . . .  
The only one who never gets tired is XLK Epsilon 7.

SNAFFLE (*patting the computer*). Still, she's going to need a little time to digest what we've fed her. Go get some dinner as well, Loop my boy. Good lord, this has been a busy devil of a day.

LOOP. Shall I bring you your usual liver sandwich, Professor Snaffle?

SNAFFLE. No, my boy. I need a clear stomach tonight.

LOOP. All right then, I'll be going home to mother.

*(He leaves. Snaffle is alone. While the computer hums and blips contentedly, he contemplates the Polypon and soliloquizes)*

SNAFFLE. Folpap will burst. This is my king of days; let every alley-cat

Etc.

G. New reading for page 72, from line 29 to page's end:

SNAFFLE. What's that? You mean my new XLK Epsilon? Leave her alone. She replaced my old Pineapple QT.

MRS. SNAFFLE. I don't doubt it for a minute. You *like* replacing your old cuties. Look at that blank screen staring at me as if it didn't know a thing! And what a nice keyboard to play on! Well, let me tell you, sweetie, you won't last very long either. I see scrap-heap written all over your face. *(She slaps the computer)* I don't believe it! Look what she's saying!

SNAFFLE. My angel, it's all technical talk.

MRS. SNAFFLE. "Eliminate interference" is technical talk? I'm going home to daddy.

SNAFFLE. The only thing XLK means is the static in the modem, I swear!

MRS. SNAFFLE. Adios. You know where you can find the stove and the children.

SNAFFLE. Poopinippy!

**H. Page 73, delete lines 1 - 11 and resume at line 12:**

MRS. SNAFFLE. Do you dare call me poopinippy? Etc.

**I. Page 73, following Mrs. Snaffle's long speech:**

SNAFFLE. But my dear—how can you—my connection with Epsilon—with the computer—is strictly business—scientific research—cold and calculating—ha ha ha ha!—calculating—did you get the joke?

MRS. SNAFFLE (*bawls louder*). Jokes! Jokes!

Etc.

**J. Page 75, the section from line 18 to the end of the page is abbreviated as follows:**

as it folds here, billow upon shimmering billow. You scintillate, Mrs. Culpepper! Your eyes, your teeth, your zipper, your diamond necklace! Fancy dear General Culpepper fetching in enough wages to pay for it, because I'm simply *convinced* it's real! Oh Mrs. Culpepper, I pronounce your taste exquisite from top to—bottom.

MRS. CULPEPPER. Have you noticed my ring? My dear Winston liberated it from the finger of a Congolese chief he disemboweled in the

#### IV

#### OF ANGELS AND ESKIMOS in COLLECTED PLAYS, VOLUME TWO

**A. New reading for page 172, lines 25-27:**

*replaces where he found it. He admires his handiwork for a moment, then, hearing the front door, he finds a hiding place, from which he will follow events with marked interest)*

**B. New reading for the third speech on page 180:**

TALBOT. A park, Mr. Buckingham. (*The Black Shadow is fascinated*) That's why I was trying to interrupt you. I plan to convert the land into a park. Flowers, grasses, trees—the works. Quacking in the duckpond from dawn to dusk. Lawn chairs.

**C. New reading for the last line of Act Two:**

ALL. To John Talbot! (*The Black Shadow makes a contented exit*)

**D. New reading for page 194, lines 17-21:**

*the room, clucks disapprovingly over its disorder, straightens it out a little, dusts a bit with a toy feather-duster he carries, and suddenly notices the money-bag on the table. He opens it, looks at the money, chuckles, and then deposits a money-bag of his own next to it. He is about to leave when the policeman pounces)*

**E. Throughout the text:**

Various dollar amounts can be brought up to date in a production.

**V**

**THE PATRIOTS OF NANTUCKET**

**Errata:**

Page 53, 9th line from bottom, *delete* ] the

Page 61, *delete* the 14th and 15th speeches.

## VI

### THE KUKKURRIK FABLES

#### Errata:

Page i, 3rd line from bottom, *read* ] revived rabbit,

Page 2. The first line is missing; *supply*] Thousands of miles.  
More fogs, storms, nasty wind currents, gulls and

Page 23, 6th speech, line 3, *read* ] apartment

Page 29, line 19, *read*] lower extremities.

Page 55, 6th speech, *read*] And now he began to strut about  
the gravel, wagging his little behind.

Page 76, line 6, *delete* ] at

Page 101, line 11, *read* ] their families,

## VII

### SIGISMUND, PRINCE OF POLAND

Ungarbled reading for page 19, 11th speech.

KLOTALSKI. Be silent, girl! I *should* have ordered her executed at once—but—the girl's simplicity and youthfulness—an aging man's compassion—the involuntariness of her trespass—



## APPENDIX B

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<sup>1</sup>Straightforward translations are omitted from this bibliography.

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(Through 1993)

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*The Kukkurrik Fables*  
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*Seven Comedies by Marivaux*  
*The 'Ariadne' of Thomas Corneille*  
*Five Comedies of Medieval France*  
*'The Land of Upside Down' of Ludwig Tieck*  
*August von Kotzebue: the Comedy, the Man*

### MISCELLANEOUS

*Annotations to 'Vanity Fair' (with John Sutherland)*